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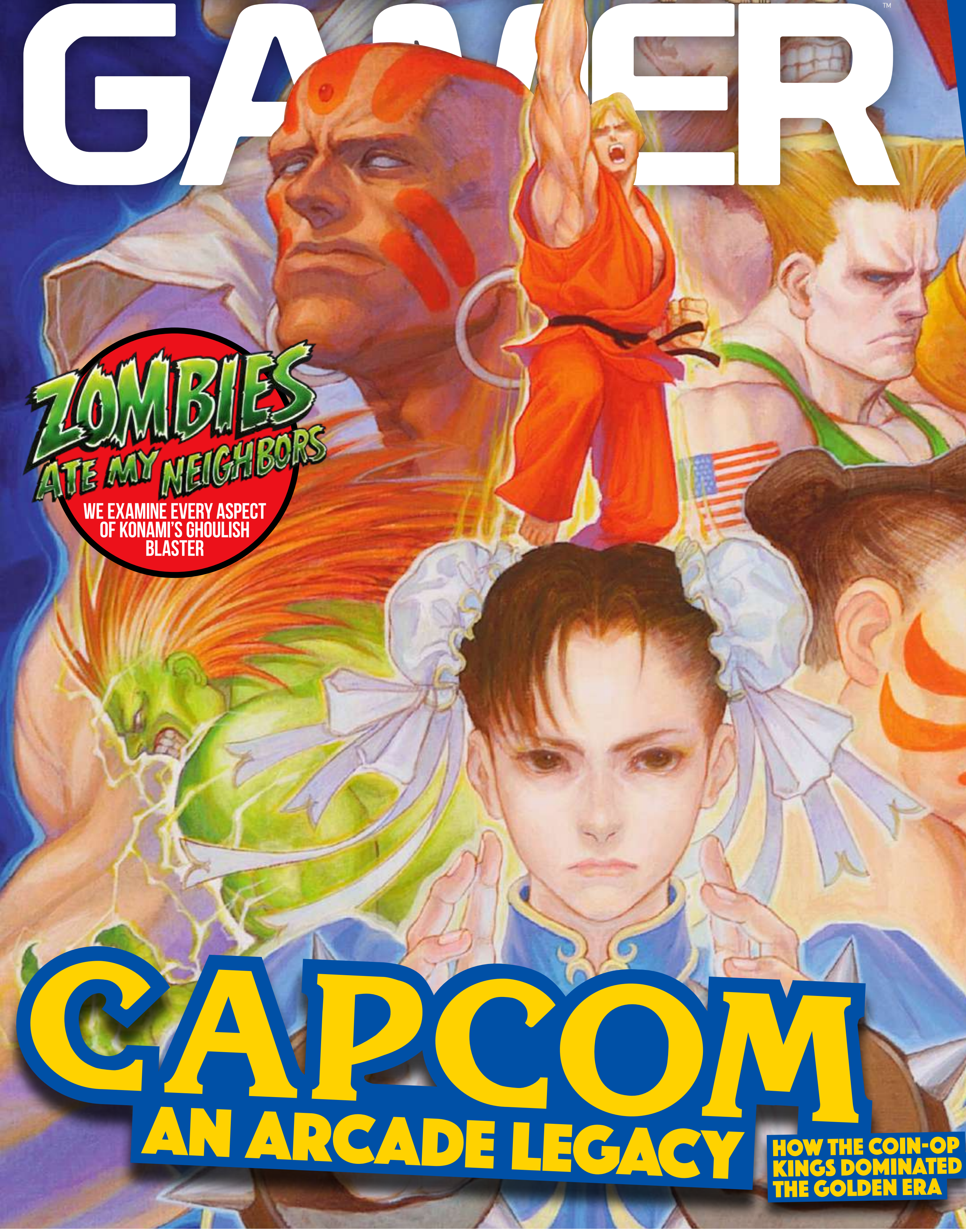

ZOMBIES ATE MY NEIGHBORS

WE EXAMINE EVERY ASPECT OF KONAMI'S GHOULISH BLASTER

8 EXCLUSIVE COVERS TO COLLECT

No.1 STREET FIGHTER II

CAPCOM

AN ARCADE LEGACY

HOW THE COIN-OP KINGS DOMINATED THE GOLDEN ERA

FUTURE

LOAD 217

THE MAKING OF NARC

EUGENE JARVIS RETURNS TO HIS VIOLENT ARCADE HIT

MASTER SYSTEM GEMS TO COLLECT

THE KEY TITLES TO BUILD AND EXPAND YOUR COLLECTION

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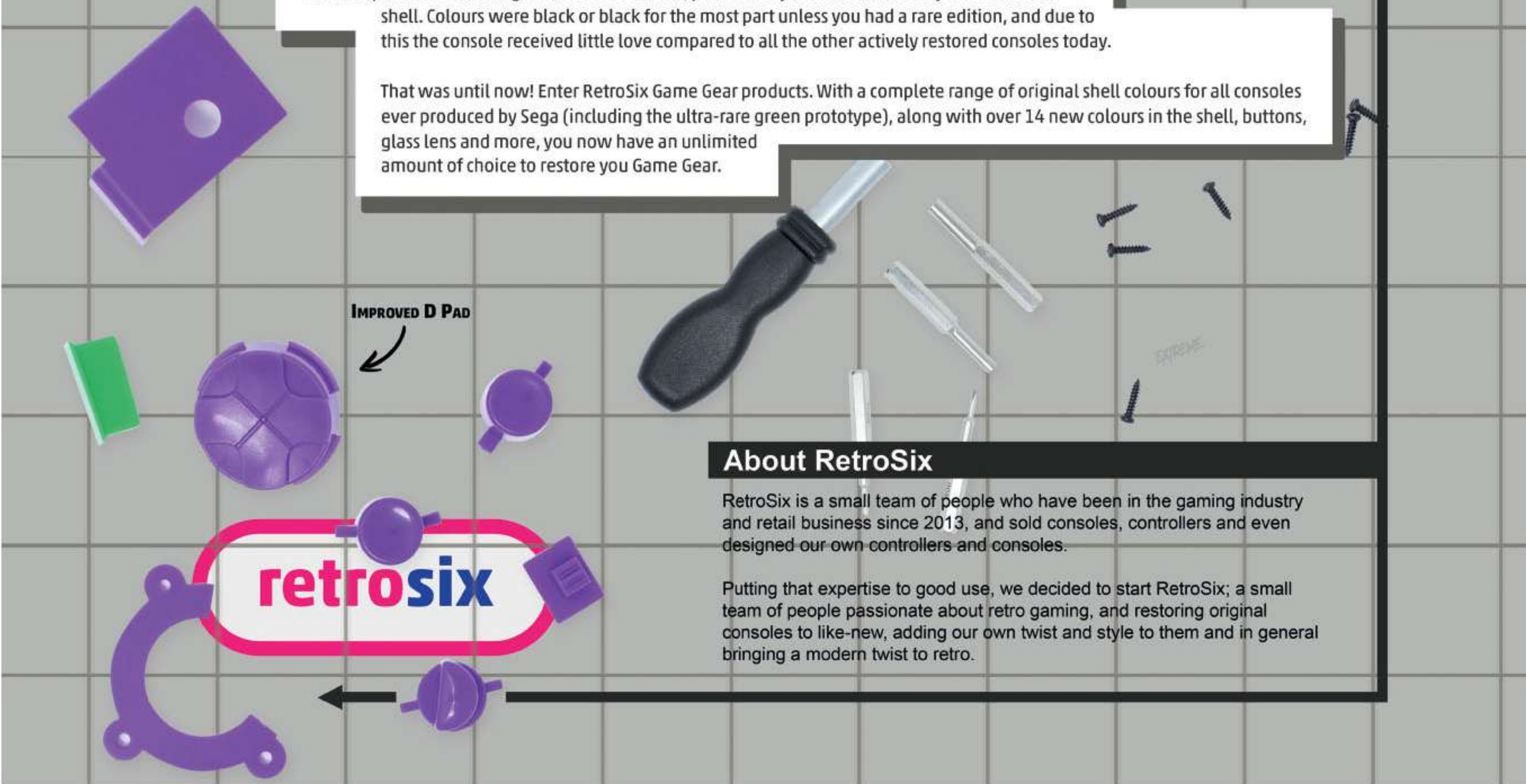
OVER 14 SHELL COLOURS

A COMPLETE RESTORATION SOLUTION FOR YOUR AGING GAME GEAR

Until now the only thing we could do to restore Game Gears was to replace the capacitors and try and keep them functioning. With a faded screen, poor battery life and an old dirty and worn out shell. Colours were black or black for the most part unless you had a rare edition, and due to this the console received little love compared to all the other actively restored consoles today.

That was until now! Enter RetroSix Game Gear products. With a complete range of original shell colours for all consoles ever produced by Sega (including the ultra-rare green prototype), along with over 14 new colours in the shell, buttons, glass lens and more, you now have an unlimited amount of choice to restore you Game Gear.



About RetroSix

RetroSix is a small team of people who have been in the gaming industry and retail business since 2013, and sold consoles, controllers and even designed our own controllers and consoles.

Putting that expertise to good use, we decided to start RetroSix; a small team of people passionate about retro gaming, and restoring original consoles to like-new, adding our own twist and style to them and in general bringing a modern twist to retro.

THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE CAPCOM ARCADE GAME?

DARRAN JONES

Oh come on it's clearly *Strider*. 199 issues and I've finally got it on the cover!

Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls, a SNES-loving cousin and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!

Currently playing: *Paper Mario*

Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

Street Fighter III: Third Strike, which is odd because I've only played it once in the arcade. Got my ass handed to me at the London Trocadero ten years ago.

Expertise: Completing Games Pass games before they leave the service

Currently playing: *The Elder Scrolls Online*

Favourite game of all time: *Street Fighter III: Third Strike*

NICK THORPE

My pick has to be *Capcom Vs SNK 2*. It just has so much going on with all the characters and groove options, so no two opponents will pick the same strategy for a fight.

Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III

Currently playing: *Puyo Puyo Vs Tetris 2*

Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

When I was 11 my parents took me and my brother to Malta and among the various arcade machines there *Black Tiger* was the one that stood out the most.

Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!

Currently playing: STALKER: Anomaly

Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War*

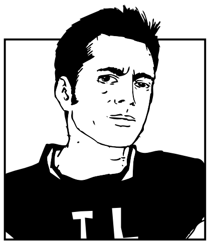
PAUL ROSE

This might be a controversial choice, but I pick *Alien Vs Predator*. Two movies I love, combined with my favourite genre of game.

Expertise: Winging it

Currently playing: At setting up my new Atari VCS, which I'd completely forgotten I'd backed two years ago…

Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*



IAIN LEE

I have always had a lot of time for 1942.

Expertise: Buying overpriced stuff on eBay then never touching it

Currently playing: *WipEout Omega*. I've forgotten how thrilling it can be

Favourite game of all time: *Elite* (BBC Model B)

LOADING...

If you were to name a company that was synonymous with the arcades in the Eighties and Nineties, Capcom would be one that instantly springs to mind. The company always felt like it was always pushing ahead of the curve, whether it was lighting up the shoot-'em-up genre with the likes of *1942*, innovating the scrolling fighter with titles such as *Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow Over Mystara* or reinvigorating the one-on-one fighter with *Street Fighter II* – Capcom's games seemed to be everywhere, and boy, were they good.

The company is celebrating its arcade heritage in the form of *Capcom Arcade Stadium*, a selection of 32 games for Nintendo's Switch. You can read more about the compilation in our main cover feature and you'll also find the art from eight of the compilation's games adorning our run of collectible covers this month. One cover is exclusive to subscribers, while the other seven are available at the newsstand (UK only) or direct from magazinesdirect.com. Write in and let us know if you track down all eight covers!

In addition to Capcom's arcade legacy, we also go in-depth on arcade classics, *Narc* and *Golden Axe: The Revenge Of Death Adder*, learn about the evolution of *Tau Ceti* and chat to Jon Hare about *Wizkid*. Oh, and check out this month's subscription offer on page 28, it really helps us. Stay safe and enjoy the magazine!

retro GAMER
CAPCOM
AN ARCADE LEGACY
ZOMBIES
8 EXCLUSIVE COVERS

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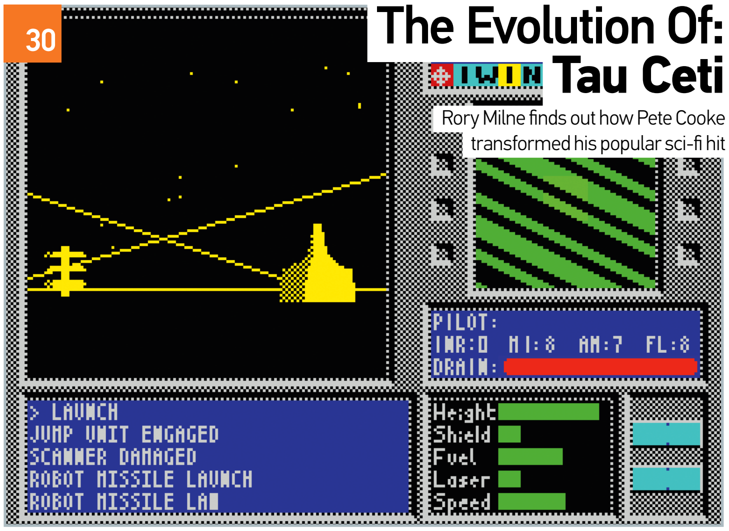

> LAUNCH
JUMP UNIT ENGAGED
SCANNER DAMAGED
ROBOT MISSILE LAUNCH
ROBOT MISSILE LA

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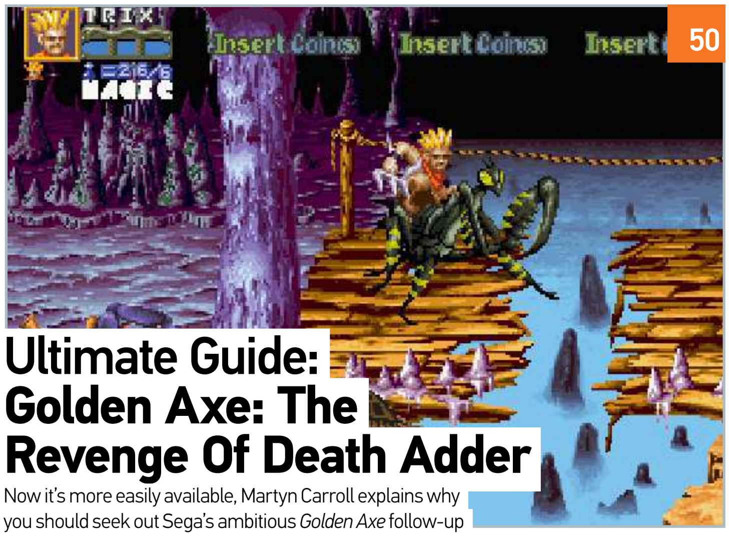

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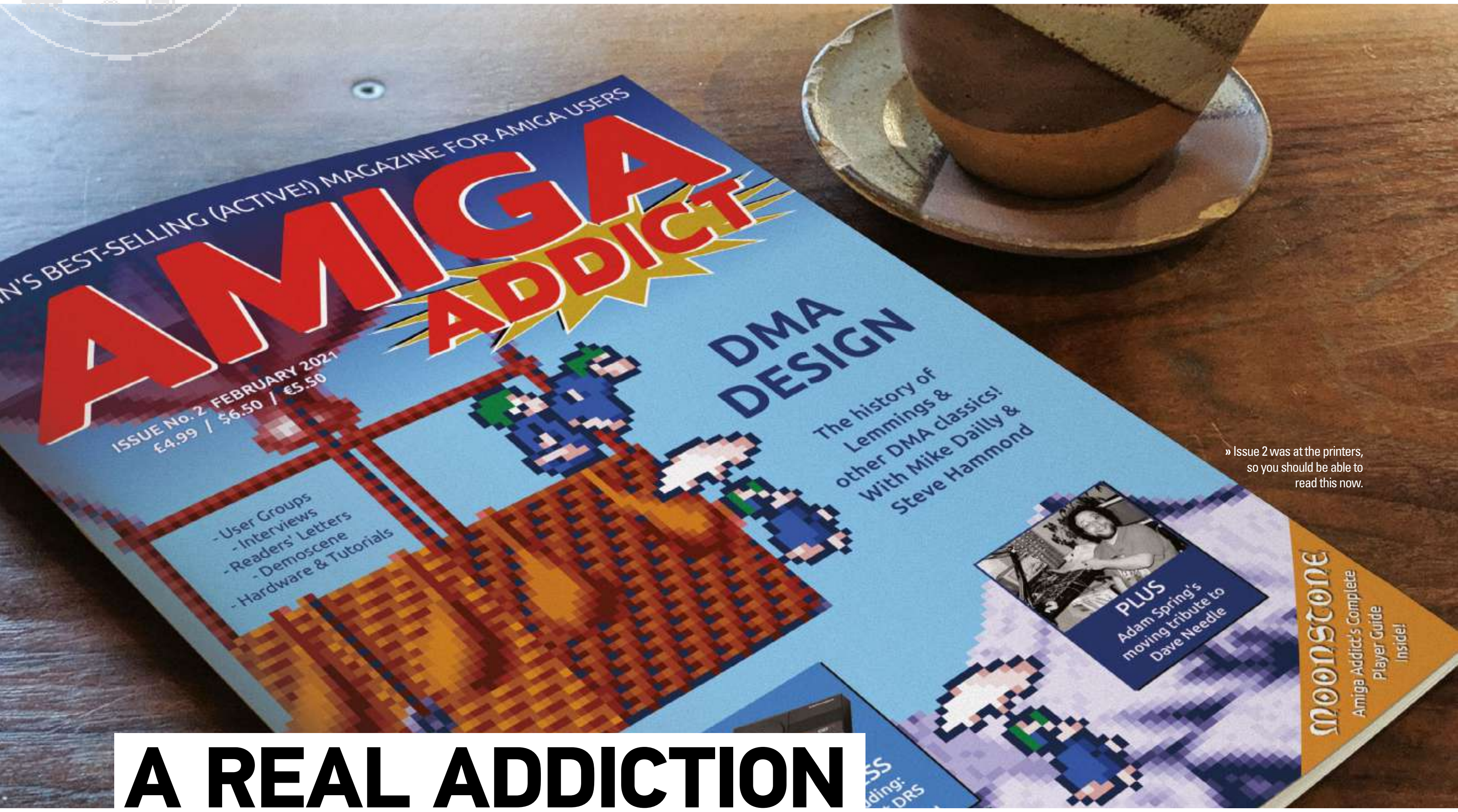
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- User Groups
- Interviews
- Readers' Letters
- Demoscene
- Hardware & Tutorials
PLUS
Adam Spring's moving tribute to Dave Needle
Moonstone
Amiga Addict's Complete Player Guide Inside!

» Issue 2 was at the printers, so you should be able to read this now.

A REAL ADDICTION

Jonah Naylor chats to us about his brand-new magazine, Amiga Addict

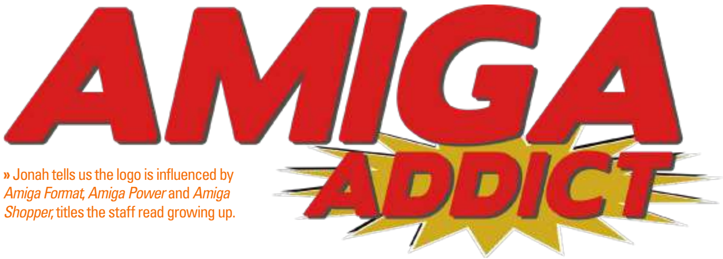
For many of us, 2020 was a time for retrospection, a time to look back to the past while we dealt with a future full of uncertainty. For Jonah Naylor, it led to the creation of a brand-new Amiga magazine called *Amiga Addict*.

"It started over a year ago now," he tells us as issue 2 hurries to the printers. "I had been looking at some old issues of various Amiga magazines such as *Amiga Format*, *Amiga Power* and *CU Amiga* – just reminiscing really. I'm a subscriber to the German magazine *Amiga Future*, but I still missed those classic magazines and their UK-style. At that point it dawned on me that I could possibly try to fill the void, and that other Amiga users may be interested in a new UK-based magazine."

Jonah knew he'd need like-minded people to make his idea a reality, and one of the key people he went to was Ravi Abbot, a co-presenter of the *Retro Hour Podcast*. "He was the one person I knew that had unrivalled passion and knowledge for the Amiga, and my hope was he may be interested in helping me to make *Amiga Addict* a success," Jonah explains. Ravi quickly agreed to join, taking on the role of deputy editor, but he wasn't the only important piece of the puzzle. "We set about putting together a small team of other Amiga addicts like us," Jonah continues. "Ian, James, Hannah and new member, Paul have all brought further passion, in-depth Amiga knowledge and content diversity to our staff."

Putting together a new magazine at the best of times is a challenge, but COVID-19 was also around to pile on the misery. "While it has been rubbish, I can't complain much," Jonah tell us. "I feel for those who've had to deal with the virus directly, or suffered with it. The worst of the challenges we've encountered, has been actually posting the magazine out to our readers. COVID-19 has meant delays both from the printers and the postal service. Add Brexit on top of that too, along with the Christmas post… well trying to get the magazine sent out on time was a very difficult challenge."

Another challenge, and one that nearly sunk the project was funding. Unlike similar projects, *Amiga Addict* isn't crowdfunded, although it was considered until the high fees to use it put the team off. "The magazine is completely funded by its readers and advertisers, initially through preorders and now from sales of actual stock," Jonah proudly tells us. "Our margins are so tight though it has been very hard to try to make the magazine viable, and that did nearly mean we couldn't get it off the ground. I always wanted a high print quality, glossy laminated cover and thick pages. This


» Jonah tells us the logo is influenced by *Amiga Format*, *Amiga Power* and *Amiga Shopper*, titles the staff read growing up.

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Amiga Bill represents! We discuss his passion for Amiga & its active scene.
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A huge 6-page interview with ex-chief engineer at Commodore, the legendary
DAVE HAYNIE
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The Hidden Battle Against The Amiga's Pirates
NEW AMIGA GAME - WIZ
is given the full AA review treatment
FURY OF THE FURRIES
AA is joined by our special guest "Amigo" John to look back at this often-forgotten classic!
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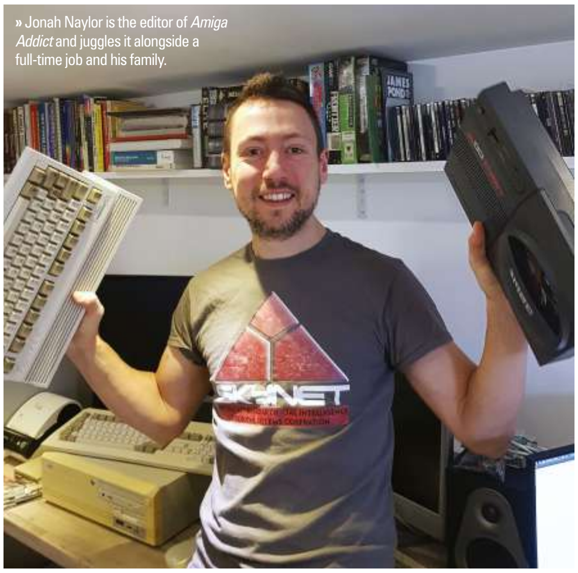
» The first issue of *Amiga Addict* features Bill 'Amiga Bill' Winters as its cover star.



» Jonah Naylor is the editor of *Amiga Addict* and juggles it alongside a full-time job and his family.

» Jonah is pleased with *Amiga Addict's* Dave Needle feature in issue 2 telling us "he was a pioneer of such amazing hardware".

» While *Amiga Addict* does revisit older Amiga games, it also reviews modern ones, too.

is fine if you don't mind charging a lot for it, but my other main priority has always been about keeping the costs low for readers. We're a grass-roots community publication, building a readership and strengthening the Amiga community is everything to us. So an affordable cover price is really important. Those two things don't usually sit well together: cheap and good quality!"

One thing that hasn't been an issue is finding quality content. We've read the first two issues now and there are some cracking features, largely down to the team's decision to speak to developers. "We knew as a team we didn't want to just repeat what has been covered so many times in the past," explains Jonah. "There is a lot of repetition already on the internet, and the great thing about the magazines of old is that they found their own stories. We're not just wanting to make money, or exploit people's nostalgia, we're trying to set up a genuine active magazine."

That developer-based focus and not wanting to simply emulate known Amiga stories also led to *Amiga Addict* having its own unique voice, something which was crucial to the team. "Right from the outset myself and Ravi planned a unique style," admits Jonah. "We wanted a sort of mix between what we missed from the classic magazines, while also staying current." That focus on capturing the past also influenced other aspects of *Amiga Addict*. "We wanted to keep that British humour and cheekiness, the tongue-in-cheek editor's comments or joke captions here and there," continues Jonah.

» The rest of the *Amiga Addict* team is Hannah Clark (advertising, proof reader), Ian Griffiths (proof reader, community correspondent), and James Walker (staff writer). *Maximum Power Up's* Paul Monaghan officially joins from issue 3.

» Ravi Abbot is *Amiga Addict's* deputy editor and also co-hosts the *Retro Hour Podcast*.

While Jonah was keen to capture the nostalgia of old magazines, he also wanted to highlight everything that's happening in the Amiga scene today. "That's why we asked Bill Winters [aka Amiga Bill] if we could feature him on our first cover," he explains. "He's one of the key icons in the current Amiga community and works hard to still promote Amiga. […] The Amiga community is really lucky that there is a lot going on and lots of new games, software, hardware and other products being released each month. All this constant new Amiga-related activity gets us really excited and we will try to cover as much as we can."

You can join in the excitement by visiting amiga-addict.com today. ✱

REALLY ADDICTIVE

Jonah has plenty to say about Amiga Addict

BEYOND THE AMIGA

Jonah wants *Amiga Addict* to cover all aspects of the popular brand, meaning later issues will feature something for everyone. "Issues 2 and 3 currently both have our brand-new section entitled CD32 Corner by Mads Kristensen," he tells us. "In fact in issue 2 we even include a lot of content on the Amiga CDTV as well as the CD32. All types of Amigas will be covered, including MorphOS, AROS, OS4 and Vampire."

A NEW CHALLENGER APPROACHES

"It was a big surprise," Jonah admits when we ask him about the rival Amiga mag planned by Retro Fusion. "I thought our idea was quite ambitious trying to get a new Amiga magazine launched in the UK after a 14-year gap! So I think Chris Wilkins is much braver than I am, I don't think I would have launched *Amiga Addict* if another UK magazine had existed. It can only be good news for Amiga fans. I wish Chris and Fusion books all the very best."

INTERVIEWING DEVELOPERS

"It's been such an honour to talk to interviewees such as Dave Haynie, the ex-chief engineer of Commodore," Jonah tells us. "We appreciate legends such as Dave giving up their time for us, and the legacy of the Amiga that they've helped build. I'm overwhelmed to be honest. […] Our big interviews and sections in the magazine are sometimes six pages long, so collating the content is a fun but lengthy process."

EVERCADE SNAGS CODEMASTERS

Last month we briefly mentioned a new Codemasters-based cart for Blaze's Evercade system, but now we can give you more details. The 17-game cartridge not only features past classics from Codemasters like *Psycho Pinball* and *Cosmic Spacehead*, but also games from Sensible Software (which Codemasters has owned since 1999) including, *Sensible Soccer* and *Cannon Fodder.* Additionally, the previously unreleased *Tennis All-Stars* will also be included. Look out for it sometime in April.

U.S. MAIL
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RETURN OF THE KING

In late January SNK dropped its first trailer for *The King Of Fighters XV*, which is due out later this year. While hardcore fans will be upset it's not sprite-based, it's looking mechanically solid, and, like *Samurai Shodown*, uses Unreal Engine graphics. As with many other modern fighters a list of DLC-based characters has already been announced including, Blue Mary, Yamazaki, Whip, Oswald, Vanessa, Heidern, Najd, and fan-favourite, Rock Howard. Expect a review later this year.

» [PC] Amazingly, it's been ten years since the release of *Lego Indiana Jones 2: The Adventure Continues.*

» [PC] The success of titles like *Squadrons* proves that there's still plenty of interest in the *Star Wars* brand.

» [PC] Will we get a new *Monkey Island* game now? We certainly live in hope.

LUCASFILM RETURNS

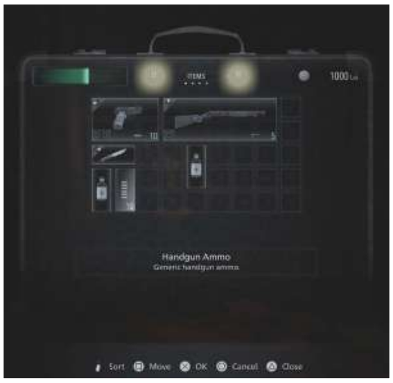
INDIANA JONES IS BACK FOR A BRAND-NEW GAME

Six months after buying Lucasfilm for roughly $4 billion, Disney decided to drop LucasArts, the publisher and developer of a number of classic games. It's now eight years later and Disney appears to have had a change of heart as it recently announced the return of Lucasfilm Games, as well as the return of *Indiana Jones*.

"Lucasfilm's legacy in gaming stretches back decades. And with Lucasfilm and the galaxy far, far away entering a new and unprecedented phase of creativity, so will the world of Lucasfilm Games – developed in collaboration with the finest studios across the industry," it revealed in an announcement. A day later, Bethesda teased a new video featuring a familiar tune, hat and bullwhip, which will be developed by MachineGames. While the studio is best known for its first-person shooters, its *Wolfenstein* games have featured a strong anti-Nazi message, which is bound to go down well with the man with the hat. Little more information has been released, so it's unclear what style of game this *Indiana Jones* game will be, but we're hoping for a *Metroid Prime*-style adventure, which would be well within MachineGames' comfort zone.

No sooner had *Indiana Jones* been revealed to the world, Lucasfilm was quick to mention that a new *Star Wars* game was being developed by Ubisoft. This in itself is rather interesting, as Disney already has a deal in place with Electronic Arts for new *Star Wars* games, something which is apparently not changing any time soon according to both Disney and EA.

While it's certainly good to see the return of a beloved franchise like *Indiana Jones*, we'd be a lot more impressed if there was a push on the company's back catalogue as it houses a string of fantastic games, which are currently available across a variety of digital platforms. A reimagining of *Ballblazer* or a new *Monkey Island* game would have us tremendously excited.



» [PS5] We're pleased to see *Resident Evil 4*'s slick inventory system making a return for *Village.*

» [PS5] The new trailer offers plenty of scary foes to battle, including this terrifying monstrosity.

EVIL RISES

CAPCOM REVEALS RESIDENT EVIL VILLAGE'S RELEASE DATE

Capcom recently unveiled a *Resident Evil* showcase, which revealed plenty of new information about the eighth core game in the series. The most exciting news is that the game will be available to play 7 May, but the new gameplay-focused video also suggests that *Village* is going to be a marked improvement over the excellent *Resident Evil VII* (even if it doesn't have a VR option this time around). While the game was originally announced for PS5 and Xbox Series X and PC, Capcom now states *Village* will be heading to PS4 and Xbox One and both games can be upgraded to new systems at no charge, which is something we'd like all publishers to do. Numerous special editions were also revealed and a PS5 exclusive demo entitled *Resident Evil: Maiden* was announced as well.

That demo is available now, but Capcom is promising a new demo for all systems nearer to the game's release. We were huge fans of *Resident Evil VII* so we'll certainly be keeping an eye on this.

Other highlights of the showcase included more on new movie *Resident Evil: Infinite Darkness*, and *Resident Evil: Re-Verse*, a multiplayer-focused game free with purchases of *Resident Evil: Village*.

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THE PERFECT GIFT, EVERY TIME

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Who is Iain Lee?

Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainlee.

And You May Find Yourself…

When my kids come to visit me, my youngest refuses to sleep in his room in the loft conversion because… well, because he's little and when we are little weird things scare us. I'm watching David Byrne's *American Utopia* and I'm transported to hearing *Once In A Lifetime* at the age of eight. I had a small radio on in my bedroom, it was dark and I was heading downstairs. Suddenly, Talking Heads came on and I was petrified. I was too scared to move. Frozen with fear I was unable to switch the radio off or even move downstairs, away from the thing that was frightening me. Eventually the song finished, the spell was broken and I could get to my mum, although I never told her what had scared me so much. How could I explain it? A guy, clearly in distress, apparently dropped into someone else's life? Too freaky. It still scares the doo-dah out of me.

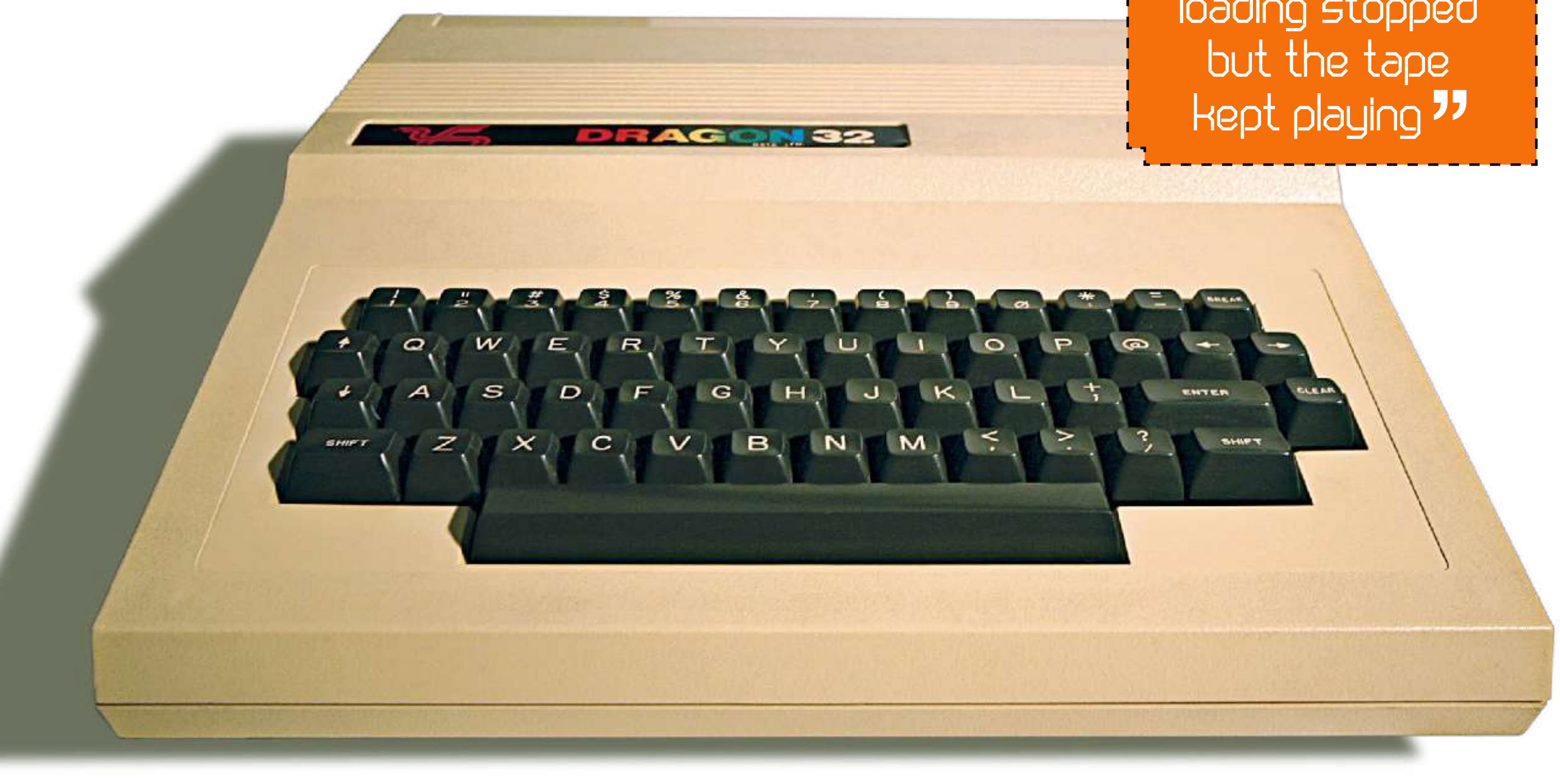
I'm reminded of something that was equally terrifying to young boy me. A Sunday evening, around the same time as Byrne et al were freaking me out, and my sister and I were playing on the Dragon 32. Mum and dad weren't around. Possibly they had gone out (it was the early Eighties, leaving kids in the house on their own was just the way it was) or they were upstairs. We were loading up a new game called *Death Mines Of Sirus*. All seemed normal until suddenly the loading stopped but the tape kept playing. There was a weird hiss and then a voice started coming out of the tape recorder. It was no hyper Byrne rant, instead it was a slow monologue delivered in the creepiest voice. I have no idea what was said because I immediately started crying and begging for it to stop. This was horrible. To my eight-year-old brain it sounded like an actual ghost from another dimension had infiltrated our living room and was teasing us before inevitably killing both me and my big sis.

We stopped the tape.

What should we do? This was the most awful thing we had ever heard and almost certainly meant death. But we really wanted to play the game. Jo voted to carry on, whereas I suggested burning it. Being three years older, she of course won. We played the tape and it was just horrendous. I may have actually passed out with fear. And suddenly, the voice was gone and the game loaded and we kind of forgot about the voice and never mentioned it again.

My plan in writing this was to go to YouTube and find a video of the loading screen and listen and laugh at how silly I had been as a kid and how brave I am as I approach 50. But there is no video there. No one has uploaded it. AND THAT SCARES ME EVEN MORE! Did this game even exist? Was it like in *The Ring* and there was only one copy of it? I have no idea how it came into our possession or what happened to it after that night. We never played it again. Did it even exist? *

> "All seemed normal until suddenly the loading stopped but the tape kept playing"



Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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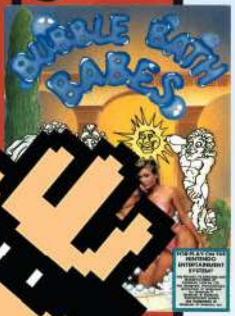
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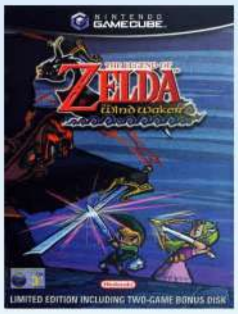
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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Less is more, actually

Off the back of reading Ernest Cline's sequel novel, I watched the *Ready Player One* movie once again quite recently. I know many people have some problems with both the book and the movie (and, for that matter, Ernest Cline himself), damning it as a series of geeky pop culture references stapled to a threadbare plot, but I always saw it as *Charlie And The Chocolate Factory* for those of us who grew up in the Eighties.

I'd seen Steven Spielberg's film when it was first released, but having made the error of going to one of those 4DX cinema showings, I was too distracted by the incessant and unnecessary movements of my seat, and having water misted into my face. Second time around, and without the pneumatic chair and moist face, I loved it, unapologetically. It's a love letter to the TV, films and videogames I grew up with, and I found it hard not to be stirred by Ernest's evident passion. Less so, admittedly, with the sequel novel, which I hated the way many hated the original.

Nonetheless, something struck me while watching it. I know I'm biased, and may have a somewhat skewed view, but I truly believe the Eighties were the best time for pop culture.

I dare say some of you reading this may be shaking your fist at the page, declaring that the Nineties or Noughties were the best decade. The thing is, yes, the Nineties were a golden age, with Sega and Nintendo dominating the first half, before the PlayStation and PC became the next big things.

Yet in many ways, those years can't compete with the Eighties, when everything was so new. So many of our mediums felt like they came of age, and that decade was, of course, the era in which the games industry started to find its feet. The Seventies, and the rise and fall of Atari, felt like a false start by the time the home computer boom kicked into gear. From a British perspective, home gaming only became ubiquitous with the release of the ZX Spectrum.

What really consolidated the decade for me is that there was less choice. You only have to look at any library of Speccy games to know there were a lot of games released for it, but it was sufficiently focused that it felt like we were a community with similar touchstones. Somehow, it felt like we were all playing the same games. And if we weren't playing *Jet Set Willy*, *Underwurlde*, or *Starglider*, we were at least aware of them.

At the risk of sounding like an old man chasing some kids out of his front garden, gaming is wildly fragmented now, a community of impenetrable sub-cultures and cliques. What we had back then gave more games a chance to shine, and for longer. Ironically, given the number of C90 tapes full of pirated games that were doing the rounds, games – to me, at least – felt less disposable than they do now. They felt like they mattered. *

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> "What really consolidated the decade for me is that there was less choice"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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Imperfect in name only

We quiz Jerry Ellis about his new book

Jerry Ellis has been writing retro books for a number of years now and his third is currently being finished. *Arcade Imperfect* looks at the 8-bit conversions of a large number of arcade classics, from *Pac-Man* to *After Burner*, and has been co-written by regular contributor Andrew Fisher. Here we find out how *Arcade Imperfect* came to be.

Where did the idea for *Arcade Imperfect* originate?

I had the ideas for both *Arcade Imperfect* and *The Book Of The Game Of The Film* around the same time, when I was writing *The 8-Bit Book*, way back in 2008. It took me a while to get around to bringing them to life, but then I've always been a bit of a slow mover!

How did the Oliver Frey cover come about?

Being an avid *Zzap! 64* reader back in the day, I was always a huge fan of Oli's artwork (I even tried to mimic his style for my art GCSE and A-level) and in the past few years I've been lucky enough to snap up quite a few of Oli's original cover paintings. After one of my earlier concepts for the cover of *Arcade Imperfect* didn't quite pan out, it occurred to me that asking Oli and Roger [Kean] to create a cover for me was a far better idea. The boy playing *Space Harrier* in the middle of the picture is actually my son, Willy.

1-PLAYER
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1-UP=02
HI-SCORE
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TIME
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2-PLAYER
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» [Arcade] Darran's looking forward to the 12-page *Strider* feature. There is a 12-page *Strider* feature, right?

How did the collaboration with Andrew Fisher come about?

I'd already written about two-thirds of *Arcade Imperfect* by the spring of 2019, but then I moved back to London to start a new full-time job as a teacher, and work on the book ground to a halt. Given that I'd already put so much time and effort into it, I approached Andrew to see if he could submit the remaining 100-or-so pages of text, and he agreed.

CONGO BONGO
043

» Each entry does a great job of covering differences between versions, although it doesn't include images of each.

MAD PLANETS
257

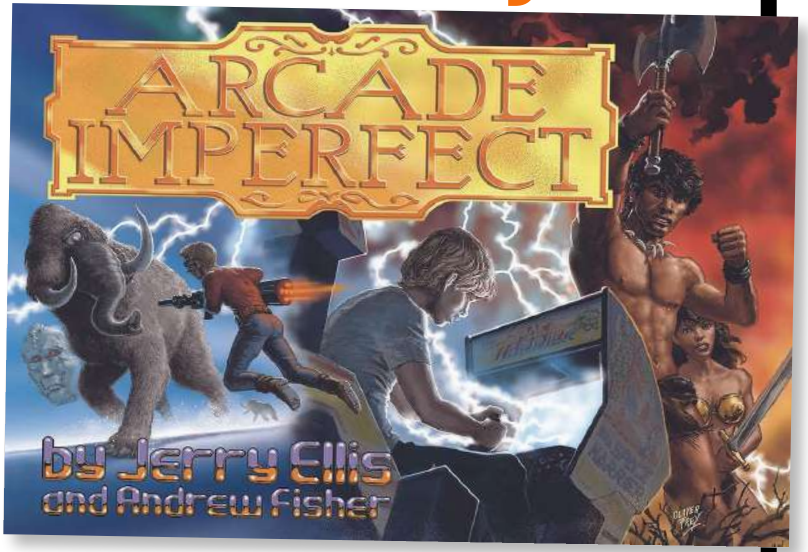
» We know Andrew is a big fan of *Crazy Comets*, so we're not surprised to see this.

Has his inclusion allowed you to cover more games?

Not really; I'd already compiled the list of games that I wanted the book to cover, and Andrew simply worked his way through that.

Why do you think arcade conversions were so popular on the home computers of the time?

Well, there's the allure of the unattainable… I mean, you could never actually own a real arcade machine, back then at least! So the thought of somehow being able to play those games on your home computer was really enticing. Also, the companies that obtained those licences would have had to back the 8-bit conversions with big advertising campaigns to drive sales, and of course that must have led to increased demand among computer gamers.



» Jerry's son has been immortalised on the cover of his new book. The artwork is by Oliver Frey.

Are you a fan of how arcade games would often play to the strengths of a particular system or feature new music?

Sure – a good example would be the way programmers converting arcade games for the ZX Spectrum would have to be very creative in the way they designed the graphics, given the machine's colour limitations. As a result, a lot of the Spectrum ports ended up with their own identity – the gameplay may be more or less the same as that of the original coin-op, but the visuals are unmistakably unique to that computer.

Are you featuring versions of each converted game? If not, why?

Each essay mentions which 8-bit computers any given arcade game was ported to, but I didn't want the book to read like some sort of encyclopaedia or reference guide, so there are no slavish attempts to provide exhaustive lists. It was essential to ensure that *Arcade Imperfect* would be a pleasure to read, so striving to provide entertaining writing was always the top priority.

Will you be covering any 16-bit versions of games?

Nope. I wasn't really paying attention to computer games during the 16-bit era so there's no real emotional connection there for me. Actually Andrew did cover a lot of the 16-bit versions in most of his submissions, but as they weren't in keeping with the original concept, I had to edit those bits out… sorry Andrew!

PART 3-D
WE'LL TAKE YOUR GAME
TO ANOTHER DIMENSION

» *Arcade Imperfect* is divided into three chapters, each highlighting a specific arcade period.

Why do you restrict the run to only 500 copies?

The Book Of The Game Of The Film had an initial hardcover print run of 250, followed by a second print run (in paperback) of 250, so there are actually only 500 copies of that book out there. As *Arcade Imperfect* has always been intended to serve as a companion to *TBOTGOTF*, it made sense to produce a matching overall number this time around.

Is there the opportunity to reprint if demand exceeds this?

Anything's possible! *

» Regular **Retro Gamer** freelancer Andrew Fisher has contributed to *Arcade Imperfect* and has written around 100 pages.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

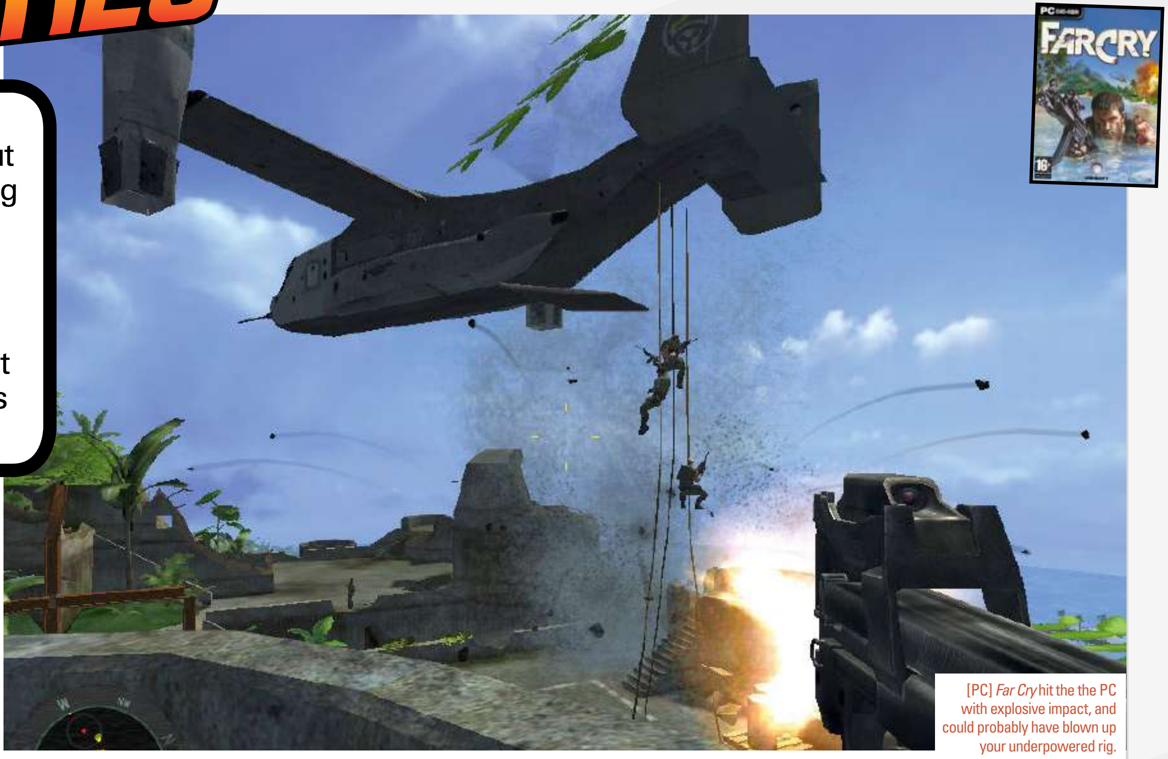
APRIL 2004 – The spring slump hits the consoles, but whispers of the forthcoming console generation and a stellar remake keep things interesting. So let's do the time warp again! Actual time travel, that is – Nick Thorpe does not dance

NEWS APRIL 2004

A plan to reunify Cyprus as a small federal republic was voted down in a referendum on 24 April. 65% of Turkish Cypriot voters supported the proposals, but 75% of the majority Greek Cypriot population rejected them. To have passed, the proposals would have needed majority support from both communities on the island. For Greek Cypriot voters, key issues leading to the rejection included long-held grievances relating to Turkey's invasion of the island in 1974, as well as the provision for Turkish military forces to retain a presence in Cyprus. The proposals for enforcing equality in the Senate and the involvement of foreign powers in the nation's highest court also upset voters.

Also on 24 April, Estée Lauder passed away at her home in Manhattan, New York at the age of 97. She had entered the cosmetics industry in 1946 with her husband Joseph, going international in 1960 and going public in 1995. In 2020, her eponymous company made $606 million on sales of $14.29 billion.

On 28 April, Comcast withdrew its $66 billion bid for the Walt Disney Company, citing disinterest from the board of Disney. Had the move gone ahead, it would have created the world's largest media company, merging Comcast's expertise in cable TV and internet service provision with Disney's content production, including its Disney and Miramax film studios along with the ABC and ESPN television networks. However, the move was unsolicited and seen as hostile, leading to the rejection.



[PC] *Far Cry* hit the the PC with explosive impact, and could probably have blown up your underpowered rig.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM APRIL 2004

The Xbox and GameCube have barely been out two years in the UK, but it's already time to start talking about the next generation of home console hardware. According to *Edge*, Microsoft had shipped out development kits for its forthcoming successor to the Xbox, under the codename Xenon. The hardware sounded suitably beefy, with two Power Mac G5 units running in parallel, and an ATI Radeon 9800 in place of the forthcoming custom graphics hardware. Further details were hard to come by, with *Edge*'s source claiming "The non-disclosure agreement is like nothing you've seen", but it was expected that demos from the new hardware would be seen soon. Also on the subject of software creation, 25 UK developers were rumoured to have development kits for Sony's forthcoming PSP handheld.

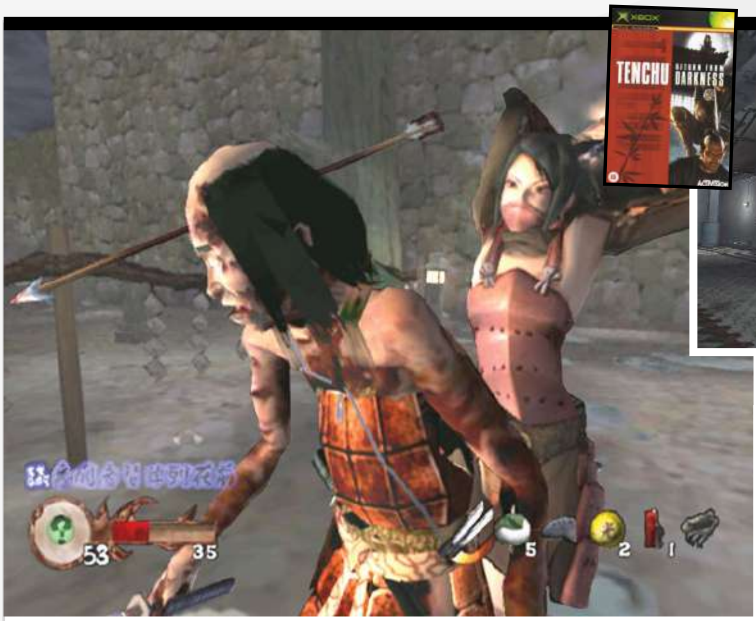
Regardless of what was on the horizon, Nintendo's Game Boy Advance was still receiving classic games as the existing king of handhelds. Rather than taking the expected step of porting *Super Metroid*, Nintendo chose to remake the original NES *Metroid* as *Metroid: Zero Mission*. *GamesMaster* described it as "the Rubik's Cube of adventure games" in an 88% review, as "it writhes about unpredictably, teasing and rewarding alternately, always one step ahead". *NGC* scored the game 89%, stopping short of the 90+ mark because "it's a bit on the short side". *Edge* agreed in an 8/10 review, but noted that "Five hours' play can lead you straight to the finale, yet most will find that they have exposed only half of the game's secrets". Also on the GBA this month, Rare's revival of *Sabre Wulf* (*NGC* 85%, *Edge* 6/10, *GamesMaster* 80%), action-puzzler *Mr Driller 2* (*NGC* 79%), and multiplayer action-RPG *Shining Soul 2* (*NGC* 84%).

Crytek's beautiful first-person shooter *Far Cry* was inspiring plenty of PC upgrades, such was its demand on your hardware. However, the investment was judged to be worthwhile. "*Far Cry* is what *Halo* could have been had it continued to be a PC game – markedly more in-depth, more serious and more freeform, and sadly, a touch more frustrating on occasion", opined *PC Gamer*'s Richard Cobbett in a 91% review. *Edge* was also impressed, awarding the game 8/10 and describing it as "frequently beautiful in every sense", but complaining of less open, less visually striking sections featuring "monsters out of control, indoor tunnel sections

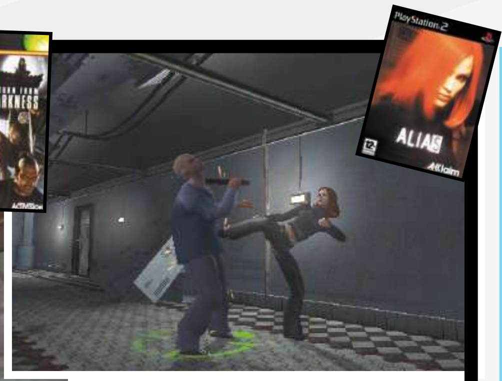
[GBA] *Metroid: Zero Mission* might not have been long, but you'd have loved every minute of it.

SPLINTER CELL

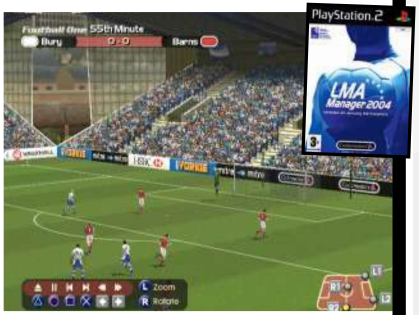
[Xbox] Sam Fisher's return was triumphant, largely on the basis of his new multiplayer antics.



[Xbox] While it wasn't strictly new, Xbox owners got their first stab at *Tenchu: Return From Darkness*.



[PS2] You might roll your eyes at a licensed game starring a hot CIA agent, but *Alias* was apparently not too bad.



[PS2] Pilot Spurs to a premiership win in *LMA Manager 2004*, because it'll never happen for real. [Feeling pessimistic, Nick? - Ed.]

and lots of grey". Other notable PC releases for the month included a belated port of *Colin McRae Rally 04* (*PC Gamer* 91%), and *Counter Strike: Condition Zero* (*PC Gamer* 75%), a spin-off of the squad first-person shooter designed for solo play.

Sam Fisher's return saw him drawing way more attention than a spy would normally want, as Ubisoft's stealth sequel *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* earned widespread praise. *Edge* felt that the developers had "missed an opportunity to move the franchise along" and created "what can only be considered *Splinter Cell 1.5*", but still awarded it 8/10 based on the strength of the "ingenious" online play that pitted spies playing in third-person perspective against mercenaries with first-person views. *GamesMaster*'s 90% review of the Xbox version offered a similar perspective, noting that the solo campaign didn't have "quite as many sections that make you smile at their ingenuity". The 85% review in *PC Gamer* offered similar sentiments, as well.

Other multiplatform games doing the rounds provided the few remaining highlights of this annoyingly quiet month. Football management sequel *LMA Manager 2004* (*GamesMaster* 83%, *Official PS2 Magazine* 8/10) arrived on PS2 and Xbox, as did Acclaim's *World Championship Rugby* (*Official PS2 Magazine* 7/10, *Official Xbox Magazine* 8.0/10). Also from Acclaim, the TV licensed action-adventure game *Alias* (*Official PS2 Magazine* 8/10, *GamesMaster* 75%) proved surprisingly enjoyable, while the post-nuclear action-RPG *Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel* (*Official PS2 Magazine* 6/10, *Official Xbox Magazine* 7.2/10) surprisingly didn't manage to do justice to its traditional RPG predecessors. Also underwhelming everyone this month were the platform pairing of *Tak And The Power Of JuJu* (*Official PS2 Magazine* 6/10, *NGC* 69%, *GamesMaster* 70%) and *Pitfall: The Lost Expedition* (*Official PS2 Magazine* 5/10, *Official Xbox Magazine* 6.4/10, *NGC* 48%, *GamesMaster* 72%).

All of the multiplatform love was welcome, because there weren't many exclusives of note doing the rounds. On the PS2, faux-MMO *.hack// Infection* scored 6/10 in *Edge* and *Official PS2 Magazine*, and 83% in *GamesMaster*, with *Edge* describing Bandai as having "taken a basic RPG, bolted on a captivating plot and a lot of ideas". The highest rated GameCube game in *NGC* was the slightly belated multiplatform arrival *Pool Paradise*, with Archer Maclean's latest scoring 80%. On the Xbox, *Tenchu: Return From Darkness* was essentially an upgraded version of the PS2's *Tenchu: Wrath Of Heaven*, and scored 8.4/10 in *Official Xbox Magazine*, which called it "a slow-burning beauty that could have done with a little more gloss".

Join us again next time, when we might hear more about those Xenon demos. Won't that be exciting? *

CHARTS

APRIL 2004

JAPAN - ALL FORMATS

1 – Pokémon: Fire Red/ Leaf Green (Nintendo)
2 – Hajime No Ippo 2 (Entertainment Software Publishing)
3 – Fu-un Shinsengumi (Genki)
4 – Shin Megami Tensei III (Atlus)
5 – Star Ocean 3: Director's Cut (Square Enix)

PC

1 – Championship Manager 4: Season 03/04 (Eidos)
2 – X2: The Threat (Deep Silver)
3 – Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre (Novalogic)
4 – The Sims (Electronic Arts)
5 – Call Of Duty (Activision)

MOBILE GAMES

PAC-MAN
HIGH SCORE
10000
ORIGINAL
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namco

1 – Pac-Man (Namco)
2 – Tetris (iFone)
3 – Call Of Duty (MForma)
4 – FIFA 2004 (Digital Bridges)
5 – Tiger Woods 2004 (Digital Bridges)

MUSIC

1 – 5 Colours In Her Hair (McFly)
2 – Yeah (Usher ft. Lil' John & Ludacris)
3 – In The Shadows (The Rasmus)
4 – Left Outside Alone (Anastacia)
5 – Cha Cha Slide (DJ Casper)

THIS MONTH IN...

GamesMaster

Reader Tom Horton is a fan of the NES, SNES and N64. "Whenever I go to school and say I like them, people laugh at me and call me names like 'old fashioned,'" he laments. "They may not have the best graphics in the world but I, personally, don't look for graphics." Well Tom, a new magazine called **Retro Gamer** might be for you.

Edge

Packaged in an opaque bag, this issue previewed *Resident Evil 4*, which ditched zombies and overhauled the series' gameplay. *Edge* was excited, feeling that it would "strip away all the niggling irritations that have blighted the series without losing anything from the core experience". This could well be a game to watch in the future.

NGC

Will the Nintendo DS be backwards compatible with GBA games? Not according to *NGC*, which gives the idea a 5/5 Miyamoto Absurdity Rating. "The only way this will happen is if Nintendo takes the surprisingly short-term view that they might as well cash in on the huge existing GBA 'ownership base'. Surely not?" Inconceivable, we're sure.

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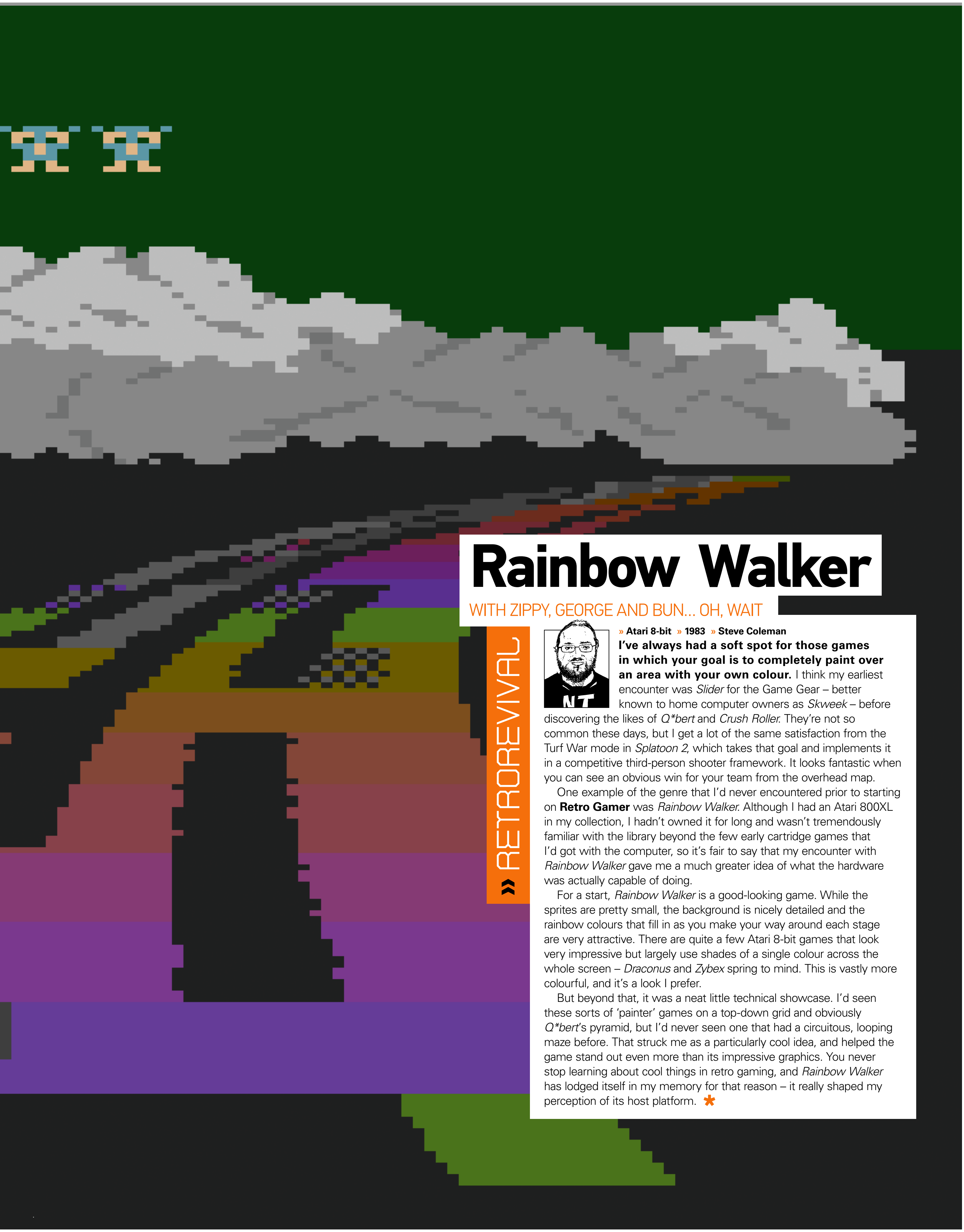


Rainbow Walker

WITH ZIPPY, GEORGE AND BUN... OH, WAIT

» Atari 8-bit » 1983 » Steve Coleman

I've always had a soft spot for those games in which your goal is to completely paint over an area with your own colour. I think my earliest encounter was *Slider* for the Game Gear – better known to home computer owners as *Skweek* – before discovering the likes of *Q*bert* and *Crush Roller*. They're not so common these days, but I get a lot of the same satisfaction from the Turf War mode in *Splatoon 2*, which takes that goal and implements it in a competitive third-person shooter framework. It looks fantastic when you can see an obvious win for your team from the overhead map.

One example of the genre that I'd never encountered prior to starting on **Retro Gamer** was *Rainbow Walker*. Although I had an Atari 800XL in my collection, I hadn't owned it for long and wasn't tremendously familiar with the library beyond the few early cartridge games that I'd got with the computer, so it's fair to say that my encounter with *Rainbow Walker* gave me a much greater idea of what the hardware was actually capable of doing.

For a start, *Rainbow Walker* is a good-looking game. While the sprites are pretty small, the background is nicely detailed and the rainbow colours that fill in as you make your way around each stage are very attractive. There are quite a few Atari 8-bit games that look very impressive but largely use shades of a single colour across the whole screen – *Draconus* and *Zybex* spring to mind. This is vastly more colourful, and it's a look I prefer.

But beyond that, it was a neat little technical showcase. I'd seen these sorts of 'painter' games on a top-down grid and obviously *Q*bert*'s pyramid, but I'd never seen one that had a circuitous, looping maze before. That struck me as a particularly cool idea, and helped the game stand out even more than its impressive graphics. You never stop learning about cool things in retro gaming, and *Rainbow Walker* has lodged itself in my memory for that reason – it really shaped my perception of its host platform. ✱

CAPCOM
AN ARCADE LEGACY

MANY COMPANIES HAVE MADE THEIR MARK IN THE ARCADE, BUT FEW HAVE BEEN SO INTEGRAL TO GAMING'S OLDEST SCENE AS CAPCOM. JOIN US AS WE DISCUSS A LEGACY OF SUBLIME SHOOTERS, BOISTEROUS BEAT-'EM-UPS AND OF COURSE, VERSUS FIGHTING GAMES

WORDS BY NICK THORPE & MARTYN CARROLL

Here's a mental exercise for you: picture your favourite arcade, any time from the late Eighties onwards. Think about the games in it. How long did it take before a Capcom game crossed your mind? We can't imagine it was long – the company was a dominant force during the heyday of the coin-ops. You could have imagined *1942* neatly tucked into a seaside arcade, *Final Fight* at the swimming pool, *Strider* hiding in the corner of the local pub or even *Capcom Vs SNK* freshly installed in a gigantic projection screen cabinet. Then of course there's *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior*, a game so popular that it can be said to have single-handedly revitalised the Nineties arcade scene. When you think about arcades, it's impossible to ignore Capcom.

Capcom's roots go back to a company called IRM Corporation, a company that was set up to develop and sell electronic gaming machines, founded in 1979 by Kenzo Tsujimoto. As a seasoned Osaka-based entrepreneur, Tsujimoto was experienced in the field as he was also the chairman of Irem Corporation, another amusement machine manufacturer that had just entered the videogames market. However, Irem was acquired in 1980 by electronics manufacturer Nanao, and within a couple of years Tsujimoto was out of favour with the new owners. In 1981, IRM became Sanbi and Japan Capsule Computer was established, providing the two words that would give Capcom its name in 1983. Capcom's early products were mechanical games, *Little League* and *Fever Chance*, but by December of that year it had opened the Acty 24 video arcade and in May of 1984 it released its first videogame, *Vulgus*. This shoot-'em-up would find distribution in North America via another Osaka-based arcade company, SNK.

Before the end of 1984, Capcom would release three more games. *Pirate Ship Higemaru* and *SonSon* were both fun games, but it was the December release of *1942* that really showed the way for the company's early years. Like *Vulgus*, *1942* was a vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up, but this time the theme was World War II. YouTuber and shoot-'em-up enthusiast Gmintyfresh remembers it as the first Capcom game he ever saw. "I was blown away after my first play by the difference between this and the previous shooters I had played like *Space Invaders* and *Galaga*, there was something special about the varied gameplay, fully fledged power-up system, and beautiful bold sprites which drew me in."

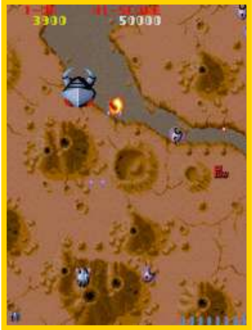
Game designer Alex Trowers first encountered the game at a pub in Hambledon, and quickly became a fan. "Nowadays, I can look at it with a more design-centric critical eye and one of the things that stands out is the fact that it's not about muscle memory," he tells us. "There are certain patterns, sure, but they're always modulated by your positioning so it's never the same game twice. Also the limitation of three player shots can be gamed – getting close to a target to increase your fire rate and damage output – increasing the skill ceiling." This depth ensured that the game had plenty of staying power in Japan, and stuck around the top ten in *Game Machine* magazine's ranking of Japan's best performing tabletop arcade games for over nine months in 1985. At the end of that year, the Famicom version of *1942* would launch Capcom into the home gaming ▶

"CAPCOM STAFF FAVOURITES

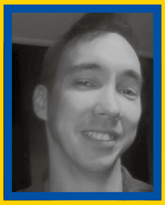
TAIROKU NOZOE

■ **Pirate Ship Higemaru**

The gameplay is simple yet deep and endlessly replayable. The nautically themed pixel-art characters, items and icons are so cute and colourful and I love both the gameplay and atmosphere of the game. Please give it a try!"



» [Arcade] *Vulgus* showed early signs of Capcom's key qualities, including attractive art and shoot-'em-up prowess.



ALEX TROWERS
GAME DESIGNER

DANNY BURKE
GAME DEVELOPER

NIC MAKIN
GAME DEVELOPER

BEN JONES
PRODUCT MANAGER, CAPCOM HOME ARCADE

PAUL DAVIES
FORMER CVG EDITOR

GMINTYFRESH
SHOOT-'EM-UP ENTHUSIAST AND YOUTUBER (GMINTYFRESH)

DIMITRIS GIANNAKIS
CPS COLLECTOR AND YOUTUBER (MODERN VINTAGE GAMER)

DOSBOXFALCO
CHAMPION SPEEDRUNNER

CAPCOM STAFF FAVOURITES

TAKASHI ISHIHARA

■ Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting

“To my younger self, this was more than just a game. A person’s value was their skill at *Street Fighter II*. Their *Street Fighter II* skill *was* them. Compared to modern fighting games it may seem simplistic, but the skill it demanded of players was the real thing. It was the kind of game that made people as serious about it as I am. Within the *Street Fighter II* series, *Turbo* features high-speed gameplay balanced with reduced attack power, which made for thrilling back-and-forth fights.”

CAPCOM STAFF FAVOURITES

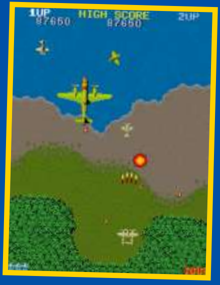
TAKASHI MATSUDA

■ Street Fighter II: The World Warrior

“This game brings back bittersweet memories of youth for me! It became the basis for the versus fighting game genre, and the great thing about it was how differently each of the playable characters looked and controlled. Each required a different strategy and I think that’s why people got so intensely involved in their matches. I not only enjoyed playing the game, but watching more skilled players than myself play while I waited for my turn…”

FRANCHISE STARTERS

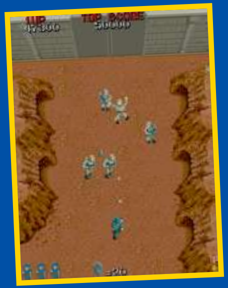
THE GAMES ON WHICH GREATNESS WAS BUILT



1942

YEAR: **1984**

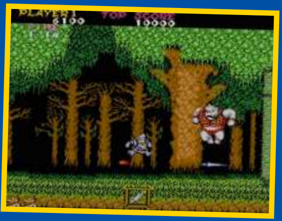
■ Not Capcom's first videogame, but the one that helped establish it as an arcade force. *1942*'s popularity led to a slew of sequels – the majestic *19XX* series – which built on the WWII shooter template. The original may look primitive in comparison but it's still a blast.



COMMANDO

YEAR: **1985**

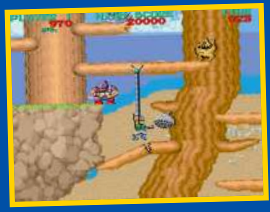
■ The game that introduced us to gun-toting, grenade-flinging Super Joe – and the unbridled joy of single-handedly blowing away an entire enemy army. It had two sequels, *Mercs* (1990) and *Wolf Of The Battlefield: Commando 3* (2008), a wild west spin-off, *Gun.Smoke*, and a host of imitators.



GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS

YEAR: **1985**

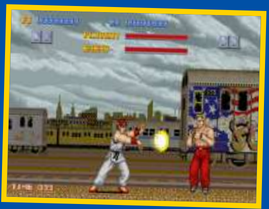
■ Lance drawn, Sir Arthur descended into the Demon World for the first time – and did die, over and over. It was challenging, but as compelling as hell. A series was born, starting with the sublime *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, and there were a couple of spin-off series in *Gargoyle's Quest* and *Maximo*.



BIONIC COMMANDO

YEAR: **1987**

■ This run-and-gun platformer was lifted above the competition thanks to its swing mechanic that saw hero Rad Spencer scale the game's dizzying stages. The *Rearmed* updates would appear belatedly, plus a 3D reboot in 2009, but it's the Nineties Game Boy spin-offs that deserve attention.



STREET FIGHTER

YEAR: **1987**

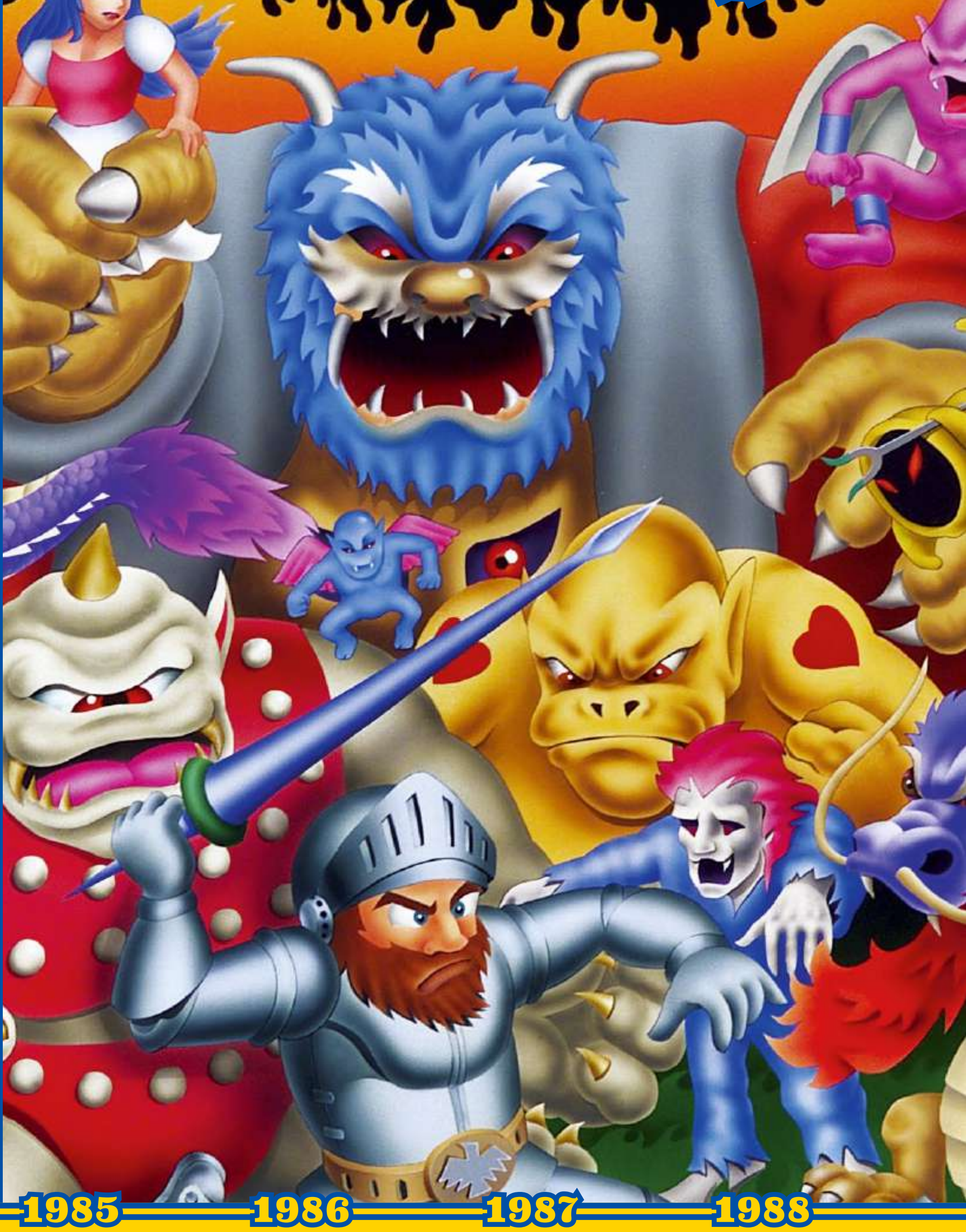
■ Has a game ever been so overshadowed by its successor as *Street Fighter*? Even Capcom ignored the original for years, before finally including it on compilations. Regardless, this is where Ryu hurled his first Hadouken, and Ken, Sagat, Adon, Gen and other combatants made their debuts.

CAPCOM STAFF FAVOURITES

MIKI KITAYAMA

■ **Ghosts 'N Goblins**

> I played this for the first time during development of *Capcom Arcade Stadium* – I am not great at action games so I had been avoiding it but when I actually sat down and played it… it was even more difficult than I had imagined! 'Is it even possible to finish this game,' I wondered to myself as I was disheartened by failure after failure… and yet I couldn't stop playing, so I did ultimately come to appreciate the fun of the game. You can plug away at it stoically by yourself, or rope in someone else and have fun coming up with strategies. What a masterpiece!



CAPCOM TIMELINE

NOTABLE GAMES FROM CAPCOM'S GLORY YEARS

1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
VULGUS SONSON PIRATE SHIP HIGEMARU 1942	COMMANDO EXED EXES GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS GUN.SMOKE SECTION Z	TROJAN LEGENDARY WINGS THE SPEED RUMBLER SIDE ARMS	AVENGERS BIONIC COMMANDO 1943: THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY BLACK TIGER ■ STREET FIGHTER TIGER ROAD	F-1 DREAM 1943 KAI FORGOTTEN WORLDS LAST DUEL GHOULS 'N GHOSTS

CAPCOM STAFF FAVOURITES

YASUYUKI TSUJINO

■ Final Fight

I played the hell out of this in the arcade back when I was in elementary school, so it has a lot of memories for me. Cody is the mayor now though.

▶ market, where it would often extend the life of its arcade hits.

Over the next few years, Capcom would make shooting games a core part of its arcade output. The company doubled down on its success with run-and-gun games like *Commando* and *Gun.Smoke*, as well as more traditional shooters like *Exed Exes*, *Section Z*, *Legendary Wings*, *Side Arms*, *Forgotten Worlds* and of course the company's first real sequel, *1943: The Battle Of Midway*. Dimitris Giannakis, CPS collector and owner of the Modern Vintage Gamer YouTube channel, remembers it as his first encounter with the company's work. "I'd played *Galaga* and stuff in the arcades, but this was just a little more advanced – it had a power-up system and it was something that stood in my mind as a really great game. It felt good, and it also had the history behind it with regards to what was going on with World War II."

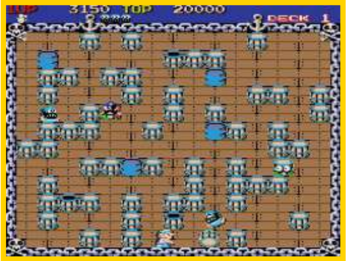
Capcom was also willing to diversify. The brutally difficult platform game *Ghosts 'N Goblins* proved successful in 1985, and its home conversion sold over a million copies. As well as following up with *Black Tiger* and the quirky *Bionic Commando*, a sequel followed in 1988 – *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*. Former *CVG* editor Paul Davies, who first played the game via its excellent Mega Drive conversion, remains a big fan. "Every little detail, from the skeletons crawling out of the ground, to the fire bats and ultimately Lucifer/Loki was superb. I loved the music too (I can still hear it as I'm writing). This was my first '4:00am' game – I'd stay up past midnight more often than was healthy, learning all the sequences and perfecting the jump attacks."

One remarkable thing was that Capcom built most of its games for standard cabinets, rather than attempting to chase the trend of larger, more gimmicky machines being sold by the likes of Sega. One notable exception was *Street Fighter*, a one-on-one fighting game in which Ryu had to beat up all sorts of menacing chaps from around the world. The game's cabinet infamously included pressure sensitive punch and kick buttons which would launch three different strengths of attack based on how hard they were hit, though alternative versions with six regular buttons were released. This was a popular game for its time, though these days it lives in the shadow of its considerably more popular successor, *Street Fighter II*.

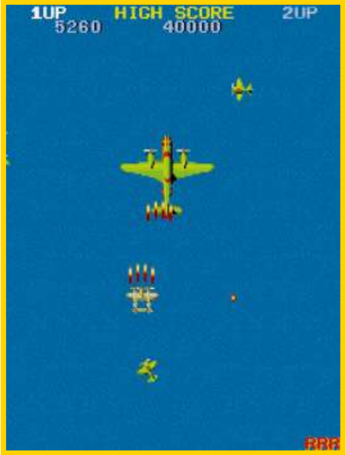
Capcom's first five years had been dominated by shoot-'em-ups, and had culminated in the deployment of the Capcom Play System hardware – better known as the CPS today. In 1989, Capcom shifted up a gear, releasing a massive 12 games in a single year. Part of this was due to a partnership with Mitchell Corporation, which supplied its own arcade technology as a low-end alternative to the CPS, and even developed notable games for Capcom such as *Pang*. But the CPS was the real revolution, a powerful 2D board that hosted a variety of hits across genres over the coming years. Some of those were naturally successors to Capcom hits, such as *1941: Counter Attack* and the *Commando* sequel *Mercs*, while others carried on Capcom's success in its core genres – shoot-'em-ups like *UN Squadron* and *Carrier Air Wing*, and platform games like *Willow* and *Nemo*. *Strider* in particular was a triumph, as players were tasked with guiding the incredibly acrobatic ninja Strider Hiryu through some highly varied stages with amazingly impressive set pieces, including a transforming robotic Politburo, an explosive mountainside chase and even anti-gravity action.

While the company had been turning out great games since its inception, by the CPS era it had established a recognisable identity that all of these games benefitted from. "They had a style about them – if you played one Capcom game, you were very familiar with looking at a cabinet and saying 'OK, that's a Capcom game, I know that art style, I want to play this and check it out,'" says Dimitris. Paul agrees that the games were particularly distinctive. "Capcom's hand-drawn artwork was superior to most, especially their humans and monsters, not just space ships and vehicles. I'd want to play them just because of how they looked." Ben Jones, a product manager at Koch Media who headed up the creation of the Capcom Home Arcade plug-and-play system, summarises the sentiment well. "I always sought out Capcom games even from an early age because they had something about them – exquisite playability. Their catalogue was pretty much unbeatable and you knew you could play a Capcom game, whatever the genre, and be entirely satisfied by it and, crucially for Capcom, want to keep playing them."

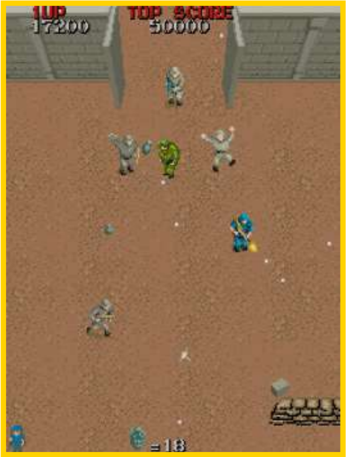
Other games would prove to be the start of new genre specialisms, such as *Final Fight*. Capcom had dabbled in scrolling beat-'em-ups before with the likes of *Tiger Road*, but the debut of Cody, Guy and Haggar was a true classic. "The artwork is ▶



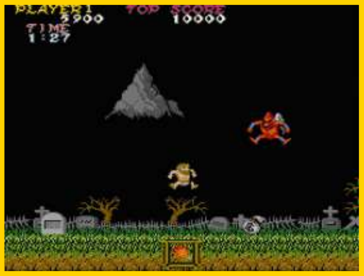
» [Arcade] *Pirate Ship Higemaru* is a charming maze game, but not one of Capcom's more recognisable releases.



» [Arcade] *1942* was a major hit for Capcom, outlasting plenty of games to take consistent earnings over months.



» [Arcade] *Commando* was another early hit for the company, renowned as much for its home conversions as the arcade original.



» [Arcade] *Ghosts 'N Goblins* was renowned as much for its extreme difficulty as anything else, but still became a hit.

1989

STRIDER ■ DYNASTY WARS
DOKABEN ■ WILLOW
LED STORM ■ UN SQUADRON
CAPCOM BASEBALL
PANG ■ FINAL FIGHT
CAPCOM WORLD ■ DOKABEN 2
POKER LADIES

1990

1941: COUNTER ATTACK
MERCS ■ MEGA TWINS
MAGIC SWORD
CARRIER AIR WING
NEMO ■ SUPER PANG

1991

STREET FIGHTER II: THE WORLD WARRIOR
THREE WONDERS ■ THE KING OF DRAGONS
ATAXX ■ BLOCK BLOCK
CAPTAIN COMMANDO
KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND

1992

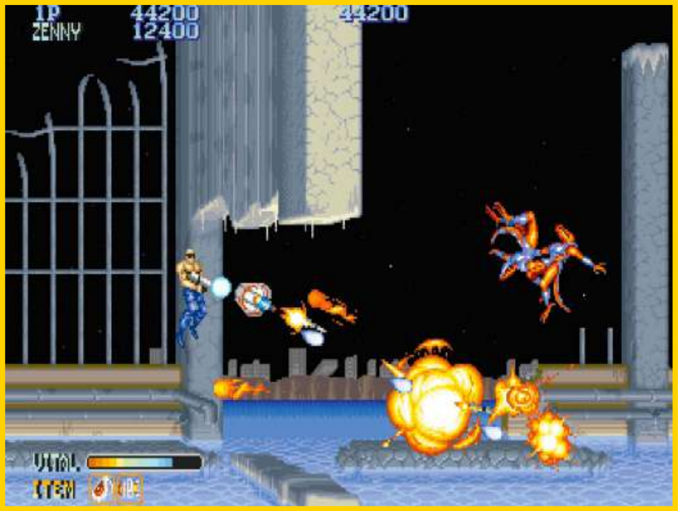
STREET FIGHTER II: CHAMPION EDITION
VARTH: OPERATION THUNDERSTORM
WARRIORS OF FATE
QUIZ & DRAGONS
STREET FIGHTER II TURBO: HYPER FIGHTING

1993

CADILLACS AND DINOSAURS
ECO FIGHTERS ■ THE PUNISHER
SATURDAY NIGHT SLAM MASTERS
SUPER STREET FIGHTER II: THE NEW CHALLENGERS ■ MUSCLE BOMBER DUO

1994

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: TOWER OF DOOM
SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO
ALIEN VS PREDATOR ■ PNICKIES
DARKSTALKERS: THE NIGHT WARRIORS
RING OF DESTRUCTION: SLAM MASTERS II
ARMORED WARRIORS
X-MEN: CHILDREN OF THE ATOM



» [Arcade] *Forgotten Worlds* was an interesting shooter with a rotary fire gimmick and gorgeous visuals.

▶ above and beyond any of the competitors of the time, the cleanliness of the sprites, the details in the backgrounds, packed with incidental effects. Nothing came close. This was backed up by carefully crafted characters and excellent music,” explains Nic Makin, developer of beat-’em-up *Raging Justice*. “Touches like the special move energy cost, though cynical me thinks it’s likely there to get you to pay more, gave a neat risk-reward to the play. Each character having a large move set and distinct play style, from the hulking Haggar to nimble Guy, the game was designed to give the player choice. The enemies were also nicely balanced, each with a recognisable look and unique way of attacking. The game was so well-designed, even down to the attract mode, with that evil laugh, making it easy to find in an arcade.”

But of course, the biggest game that the CPS hosted was *Street Fighter II*. While one-on-one fighting games had existed before, Capcom’s game codified the genre as we know it today, offering a selection of colourful characters and unrivalled play mechanics. “I used to go probably on a weekly basis for a while to a packed Cascade Amusements in Nottingham’s city centre to while away a Saturday afternoon in a smoke-filled environment spending all my pocket money – great times,” says Ben. “But further than that, *Street Fighter II* single-handedly created a type of game genre that’s still as popular today, with its core mechanics being basically exactly the same 30 years on.”

“CAPCOM STAFF FAVOURITES

YUSUKE ISHIZUKA

■ 19XX: The War Against Destiny

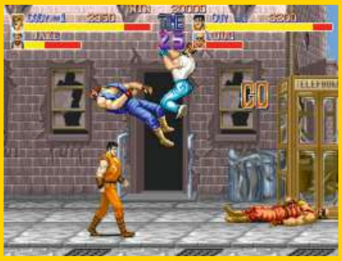
This game features a great variety of attack options and you need to use them all, from taking out persistent enemies with marker missiles to using variable bombs to get out of tight spots. The level design is also really great and encourages such strategic gameplay. This game is really replayable and is a lot of fun to chase high scores on. I also really like the hard-edged atmosphere of the game’s visuals with lots of cool little details. It’s got a killer soundtrack filled with memorable percussion hits – my favourite track is the stage 1 theme *A Bit Of Blue Sky Between The Clouds*.”

Street Fighter II drove a boom in arcade gaming in general and fighting games specifically, with rival developers launching their own competing games. Cross-town rival SNK was one of the first with *Fatal Fury*, directed by *Street Fighter*’s original director Takashi Nishiyama, and would become arguably Capcom’s biggest rival in the genre, while the biggest Western competitor was Midway’s *Mortal Kombat*.

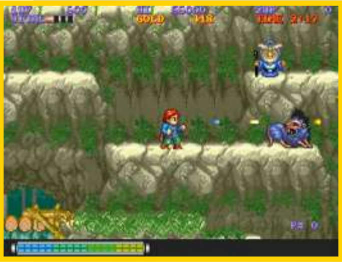
Fighting fever even spilled over into the home market. “*Body Blows* was inspired by Street Fighter II and SNK’s Fatal Fury,” says Danny Burke, graphic artist and concept creator for the well-regarded Amiga fighting game. “I tried to take aspects from both – Dan and Nik having the same moves like Ryu and Ken, and also being brothers like Terry and Andy Bogard.” Of course, the game was differentiated from its inspiration. “Only Dan, Nik and Kossack were slightly based on the *Street Fighter II* original roster,” says Dan. “There were also different special moves that hadn’t been done before, for instance Ninja’s invisibility.” It was a good job too, as Capcom was fiercely protective of its hit. The US branch even sued Data East for copyright infringement over similarities between *Street Fighter II* and *Fighter’s History*, albeit unsuccessfully.

As Capcom hit its tenth anniversary, it also reached a turning point, as this was when it pivoted towards specialising in fighting games. *Street Fighter II* had done wonders for the company, and over the past few years the company released a number of upgraded versions. Super *Street Fighter II Turbo* was to be the last of them, and Capcom began its efforts to move on with the introduction of two new fighting games – the comic licence *X-Men: Children Of The Atom* and the original horror-themed game *Darkstalkers: The Night Warriors*. Both were hits, and Capcom was soon off to the races with follow-ups *Marvel Super Heroes* and *Night Warriors: Darkstalkers Revenge*, as well as the *Street Fighter Alpha* prequel series. “Capcom built a rapport with its audience, putting games out on test and taking feedback seriously. The early fighting game community was respected and honoured with refinements based on suggestions. Magazines celebrated the games *and* the top players. These top players would then inform the next iteration of fighting games, and so it went on,” says Paul.

In 1996, Capcom started to look beyond the CPS II. For 3D games like *Star Gladiator*, it adopted the PlayStation-based ZN1 board, but it also developed the CPS III board for 2D games, the first of which was *Red Earth*. This was fantastically powerful hardware, but at a time when 2D was going out of fashion. “In the light of where the industry ended up, it was certainly a bit of a restrictive decision,” says Alex. “But again, Capcom’s signature look was very much centred around its pixel-pushing power and flat or low-res poly textures just wouldn’t work for them.” Unfortunately, the hardware’s flagship game was the long-awaited *Street Fighter III*. Though the final *Third Strike* revision is known as a classic today for its stunning animation and dramatic tournament battles, in 1997 the initial version was met with scorn for ditching most of the *Street Fighter II* cast and ▶



» [Arcade] *Final Fight* was a beat-’em-up breakthrough, and its quality carried through Capcom’s later efforts in the genre.



» [Arcade] *Willow*’s visuals show off the signature style that made Capcom games instantly recognisable in a packed arcade.

1995

NIGHT WARRIORS: DARKSTALKERS’ REVENGE
CYBERBOTS: FULL METAL MADNESS
PANG 3 ■ STREET FIGHTER ALPHA
MARVEL SUPER HEROES
MEGA MAN: THE POWER BATTLE
BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN 2
19XX: THE WAR AGAINST DESTINY

1996

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 2
SUPER PUZZLE FIGHTER II TURBO
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: SHADOW OVER MYSTARA ■ STAR GLADIATOR
MEGA MAN 2: THE POWER FIGHTERS
STREET FIGHTER ZERO 2 ALPHA
X-MEN VS STREET FIGHTER
RED EARTH ■ STREET FIGHTER EX

1997

STREET FIGHTER III: NEW GENERATION
STREET FIGHTER EX PLUS
BATTLE CIRCUIT ■ VAMPIRE SAVIOR: THE LORD OF VAMPIRE ■ CAPCOM SPORTS CLUB
MARVEL SUPER HEROES VS STREET FIGHTER
VAMPIRE SAVIOR 2 ■ VAMPIRE HUNTER 2
SUPER GEM FIGHTER MINI MIX
STREET FIGHTER III: 2ND IMPACT
RIVAL SCHOOLS: UNITED BY FATE

1998

MARVEL VS CAPCOM: CLASH OF SUPER HEROES ■ PLASMA SWORD
STEEP SLOPE SLIDERS
STREET FIGHTER EX2
STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3
TETRIS: THE GRAND MASTER
TECH ROMANCER
PUZZ LOOP ■ JOJO’S VENTURE

1999

POWER STONE ■ GIGA WING
STREET FIGHTER III: 3RD STRIKE
STREET FIGHTER EX2 PLUS
FINAL FIGHT REVENGE
JYANGOKUSHI: HAOH NO SAIHAI
SPAWN: IN THE DEMON’S HAND
JOJO’S BIZARRE ADVENTURE
STRIDER 2

2000

GIGAWING 2 ■ DIMAHOO
MARVEL VS CAPCOM 2: NEW AGE OF HEROES
POWER STONE 2 ■ MARS MATRIX
1944: THE LOOP MASTER
CANNON SPIKE ■ CAPCOM VS SNK
MIGHTY! PANG ■ PROJECT JUSTICE

CAPCOM STAFF FAVOURITES

MICHITERU OKABE

Final Fight

Every time I see this game I'm reminded of playing it with friends in the arcade game area of a bowling alley I used to frequent as a kid. I don't remember ever getting to the end, but I pumped a lot of coins into this one.

2001

PROGEAR ■ PUZZ LOOP 2
GUN SURVIVOR 2: BIOHAZARD
CAPCOM VS SNK 2
STREET FIGHTER ZERO 3 UPPER
MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM

2002

GUN SURVIVOR 3: DINO CRISIS

2003

PRIDE GP 2003
MOBILE SUIT Z GUNDAM
HYPER STREET FIGHTER II: THE ANNIVERSARY EDITION

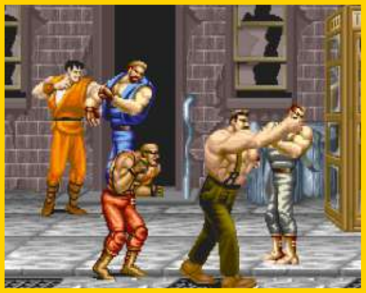
THE HARDWARE RACE

THE COMPETING SYSTEMS THAT SET THE ARCADES ALIGHT

CAPCOM CPS-1

LAUNCHED: **1988**

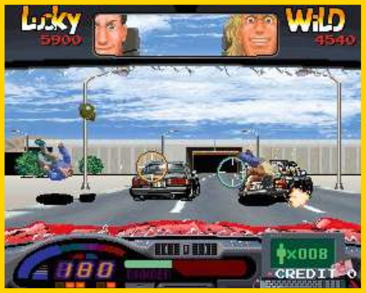
■ This was Capcom's 68000-based workhorse, running more than 30 arcade games including such hits as *Forgotten Worlds*, *Final Fight* (pictured), *Strider* and the colossal *Street Fighter II* series. To reduce costs, games came on daughter-boards that were attached to the main system board.



NAMCO SYSTEM 2

LAUNCHED: **1987**

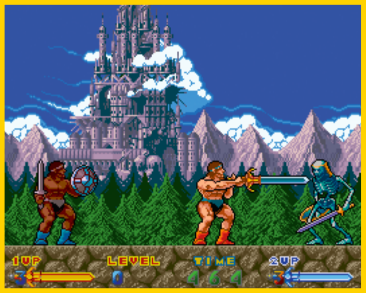
■ Utilising twin 68000s and various video chips, this powerhouse system ensured that Namco was a frontrunner in the hardware stakes. Highlights on this system included *Final Lap*, *Rolling Thunder 2* and *Lucky & Wild* (pictured). Subsequent 'System' hardware would be polygon-based.



TAITO B SYSTEM

LAUNCHED: **1989**

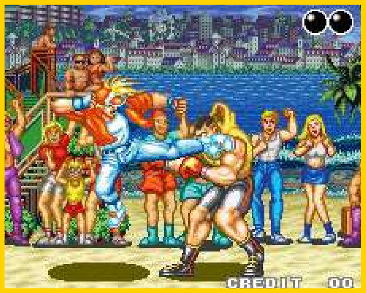
■ While Taito's similar Z System was designed with racing games in mind, its B System provided a solid platform for a variety of arcade styles. Some of the memorable hits that ran on this capable 68000 system were the *Rastan* sequel *Nastar* (pictured), *Violence Fight* and *Puzzle Bobble*.



SNK NEO GEO MVS

LAUNCHED: **1990**

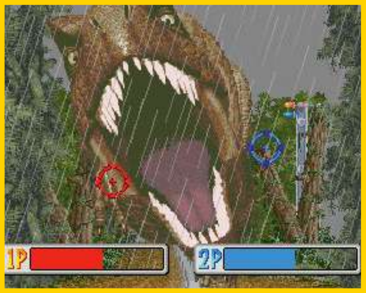
■ Easily rivalling the CPS-1 technically, thanks to its custom video chipset, this 68000-powered cartridge-based system was home to around 150 games including *Fatal Fury* (pictured), *Samurai Shodown*, *Metal Slug* and many other cult classics. A desirable home version (AES) was also available.



SEGA SYSTEM 32

LAUNCHED: **1991**

■ Sega's first 32-bit system employed a NEC V60 CPU to deliver the final revision of its 'Super Scaler' hardware. Racing game *Rad Mobile* was followed by many stunning titles including *OutRunners*, *Spider-Man: The Video Game* and *Jurassic Park* (pictured). It's hard to believe this tech was devised in 1990.



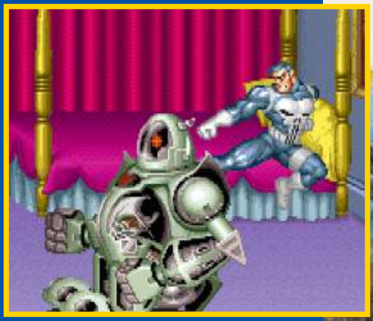
PACKING A PUNCH

FIVE REASONS WHY CAPCOM IS THE KING OF BRAWLERS

THE PUNISHER

YEAR: **1993**

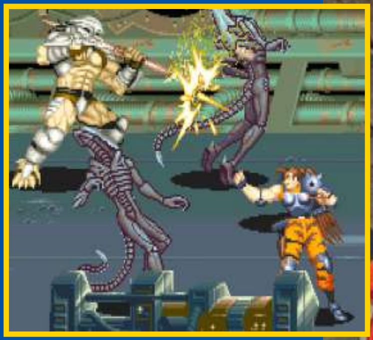
Dropping comic-book characters into a beat-'em-up was hardly a groundbreaking idea, but this winning combination plays like *Final Fight* on illegal stimulants. Taking control of Frank Castle (with Nick Fury joining in co-op mode), you pop many heads on the way to defeating the evil Kingpin.



ALIEN VS PREDATOR

YEAR: **1994**

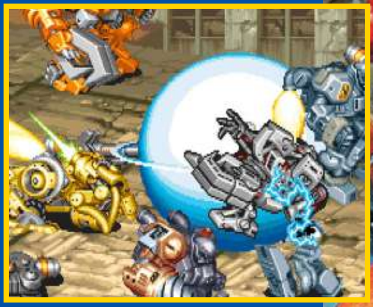
Probably the best property to carry the *Alien Vs Predator* name – and certainly the only one where a verbose Predator regains health by munching pizza. This was one of the first games to use Capcom's enhanced CPS-2 hardware to deliver more sprites, more action, more all-round mayhem.



ARMORED WARRIORS

YEAR: **1994**

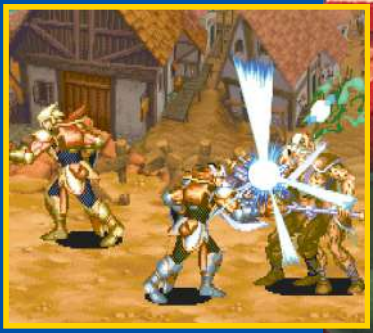
Another three-player brawler, only this one swaps out flesh-and-blood characters for warring mechs on a mission to defeat an invading force. The mechs are huge and can be upgraded, customised and combined, and the result is unprecedented levels of on-screen carnage.



D&D: SHADOW OVER MYSTARA

YEAR: **1996**

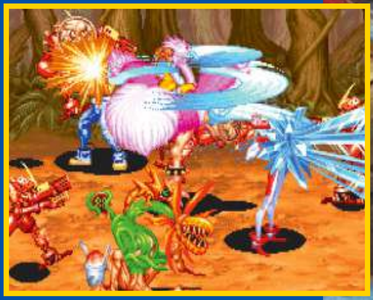
This intriguing four-player release successfully marries *Golden Axe* gameplay with the kind of customisation and XP gathering you'd find in a lite RPG. This improved on the earlier *Tower Of Doom* and both games were collected together on the 2013 release *Chronicles Of Mystara*.



BATTLE CIRCUIT

YEAR: **1997**

Having pushed the genre to its extremes, Capcom was in danger of overloading players' senses with this over-the-top, four-player slugfest that's brilliant and bonkers in equal measure. Both this game and *Armored Warriors* were included in the recent *Capcom Beat 'Em Up Bundle*.



CAPCOM STAFF FAVOURITES

THOMAS VERAART

■ Mega Twins

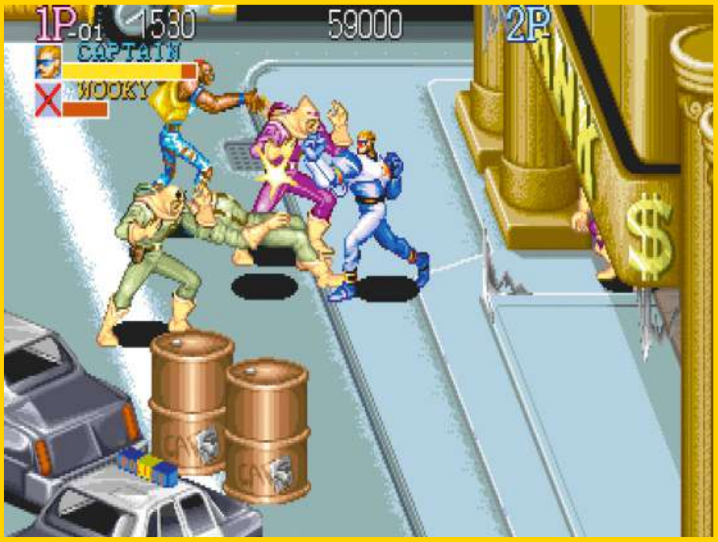
I love this side-scrolling action game because it strikes a great balance between being accessible and being brutally hard. The game has a cute art style typical for the era, but don't let your guard down too much because it could cost you! Even if you get a game over, the comical death animations make you want to put in another coin and come back for more.

introducing unpopular gameplay changes. The game unfortunately bombed, struggling to gain an audience that was well served with both 3D fighters like *Tekken 3* and more popular 2D fighters including, ironically, the *Street Fighter Alpha* games.

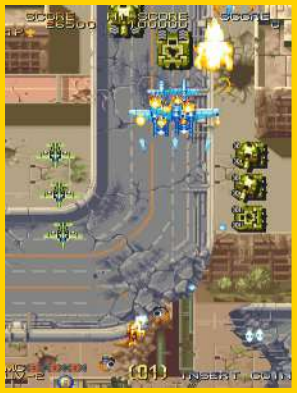
But as the decade wore on, Capcom kept introducing more fighting games such as *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*, *Rival Schools* and the Arika-developed *Street Fighter EX*, while continuing to develop *Street Fighter III*, *Street Fighter Alpha*, *Darkstalkers* and the *Marvel* games that had by this point become crossovers with the *Street Fighter* series. Did this glut of fighting games mean that the company essentially ended up competing with itself? "Not at all, they were for the most part successful games that players wanted to play," says Danny. "I guess they just followed their market audience." However, not everyone feels this way. "As someone who loves fighting games I couldn't get enough Capcom, *Darkstalkers* and *Street Fighter* and later the *X-Men* and *Marvel* titles, they all had a huge draw for me, but I only had so much money and time to spend so I'd gravitate to the same few games and characters again and again," says Nic. "Fighting games do take a certain amount of investment to get to a skill level that you can enjoy playing at, so with the large range available it's inevitable that players would limit what games they played."

Of course, fighting games weren't the only sorts of games that Capcom was making at this time, though they did ultimately account for half of the company's output from 1994 to 1998. The company continued to develop excellent scrolling beat-'em-ups like *Alien Vs Predator*, *Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow Over Mystara* and *Battle Circuit*. While shoot-'em-up production had dwindled, with only *19XX: The War Against Destiny* to note in this period, the company did try some other things, such as arcade adaptations of the *Mega Man* series that was popular on home consoles. Quiz and puzzle games were also released, the most notable being *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*. "It would have been easy for Capcom to create a *Columns* clone and slap *Street Fighter II* characters cosmetically into the design and watch the sales roll in," says Gmintyfresh. "But typically for a Capcom game, more attention and depth was added during development so that character choice made a difference to how the game played, creating a puzzle/fighting fusion which was truly unique."

Late in the Nineties, the arcade market was beginning to decline and the peak years of the fighting game boom had long passed. So, Capcom began to refocus its efforts, reducing its arcade releases and focusing less on fighting games. The result of this was that some of Capcom's old hits were reimagined for the modern day. *Strider 2* brought back the ninja for some more platforming action in 1999, and 2000 saw revivals with the releases of *Mighty! Pang* and *1944: The Loop Master*.



» [Arcade] *Captain Commando* was another entry in Capcom's line of outstanding scrolling beat-'em-ups.



» [Arcade] Capcom's production of shoot-'em-ups like *Varth* started to dwindle as the fighting game boom took hold.

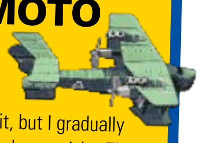
One benefit of having capable 2D hardware that was old enough to be relatively cheap is that Capcom could entice external developers to work on the CPS II. This allowed the company a major role in the shoot-'em-up genre that the company had built its success on. "Capcom was key in keeping the genre alive by fostering a safe place for external developers such as Cave, Psikyo and Takumi to operate. This is evidenced by the numerous games that Capcom published from external developers during this period," says Gmintyfresh. "In a climate where the shoot-'em-ups where seen as a dead genre and times were tough for these specialist developers, titles such as *Mars Matrix*, *Progear* and *Giga Wing* were a vital showcase of talent and income for companies sometimes operating on a knife-edge."

However, Capcom was looking for something more powerful and Sega's Naomi board was adopted, as it made games easy to port to the home market where Capcom was doing well. More 3D games were developed, such as the brilliant brawler *Power Stone*, licensed combat games like *Spawn: In The Demon's Hand*, *Heavy Metal Geomatrix* and the popular *Gundam* series. This was also where Capcom's later efforts in the fighting genre landed, and though they may not have been as commercially successful as past games, they're regarded as classics of the genre. In 2000, *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* offered a gigantic character roster packed with familiar faces and deep cuts, as well as frantic tag team action that has generated memorable tournament moments. The same year, a crossover with rival fighting game developer SNK resulted in *Capcom Vs SNK*, an intriguing game that was swiftly made redundant by its 2001 sequel, which also boasts a huge variety of characters and became a competitive favourite for years.

Unfortunately, it wasn't long before Capcom further reduced its involvement in arcade game development, as the sector continued to decline. "I think from 2000 onwards the arcades were always going to decline. Home gaming machines were becoming capable of true ▶

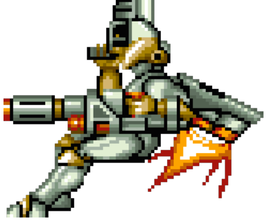
CAPCOM STAFF FAVOURITES

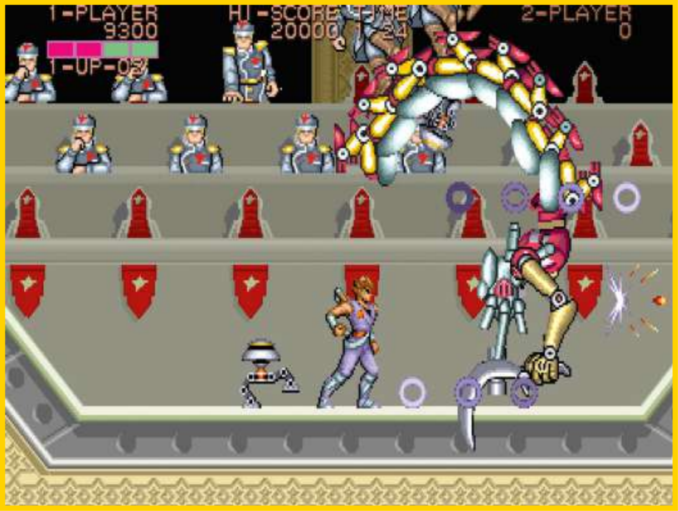
TAKEYUKI YAMAMOTO



■ Progear

At first it was too difficult for me and I could never finish it, but I gradually improved and learned new tricks. That kind of replayability meant the game was fun and rewarding. The jewel system has depth and to survive and rack up a good score, you really need to track not only the enemy bullet paths, as is standard in this kind of bullet-hell game, but the enemy ships themselves and the timing with which you take them out.





» [Arcade] *Strider*'s dynamic platforming and memorable moments ensured that it was a hit, especially with our editor.

▶ arcade-perfect gameplay, styles of games were changing too," says Nic. "I don't think even Capcom could have saved the arcades, they became more [like] fairground attractions than videogames, not something that fit with the kind of gaming Capcom was master of." Indeed, Capcom was still not in the habit of producing games for oversized showcase cabinets, and tentative steps like *Gun Survivor 3: Dino Crisis* didn't pan out. The cancellation of the crossover 3D fighter *Capcom Fighting All Stars* in 2003 was symbolic – Capcom's focus had firmly moved to the home market.

With that having been said, Capcom didn't actually exit the arcade market completely. The production of *Gundam* games continued and the company moved towards the production of games for family entertainment centres, medal games and the like instead of traditional videogames. The company even managed to revive mainstream interest in arcades for a short while when *Street Fighter IV* launched as a coin-op first, though the console versions ultimately became the standard way to play. Capcom is still involved in arcade development, continuing to produce games like *Luigi's Mansion Arcade* and *Monster Hunter Medal*, though most of its money in the arcade sector is made through the Plaza Capcom arcades it directly operates in Japan.

But while the nature of Capcom's involvement in the arcades has changed, its legacy cannot be diminished. "Each of the major studios had their own vibe; Capcom titles had a certain drama to them in which the heroes and NPCs had terrific personality. Spotting these details and quirks gave Capcom coin-ops more replay value than most, which made the games worth owning in hugely-anticipated home conversions," says Paul. "The fact that one of their IPs is still being made today, 30-odd years later speaks volumes. Their method of sequencing inputs to create a move is now just the way it's done. I also know of several artists who wouldn't have had a career in the games industry without Capcom artwork as their inspiration," adds Alex. "Capcom was definitely one of the top companies in the arcade gaming market," says Danny. "You have to realise that people still play the arcade classics today and Capcom still makes money on *Street Fighter II* and other games on new console hardware. That's why retro is a thing!"

It's not just nostalgic gamers that are enjoying those classics, as Capcom's arcade games still hold appeal for new players. "I don't believe I've ever even seen a legit Capcom board in the wild before, which is somewhat sad," admits dosboxfalco, a speedrunner whose young age meant that he missed the glory years of the arcade scene. Instead, he experienced the classics at home. "I got great grades when I was about nine or ten, and got taken to Gamestop to get a game, and I picked *Capcom Classics Collection Remixed* for the PSP because it was cheap." *Final Fight*, *Magic Sword* and *1941* were favourites then, but *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* and *Strider* are the games he's best known for today. "When I was good enough at both, and had a decent amount of experience, I looked up the world record speedrun. For *Ghouls*, it was a 15:23 by my good dude Aquas. *Strider*, an 8:15 tool-assisted longplay erroneously published on speedrun.com. For both, I went 'Yeah, I can do better than that' and went on long grinds." Today, he holds the records for both, beating *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* in 15:06 and *Strider* in under eight minutes. "I think Capcom is *the* arcade developer. They were incredibly prolific, created many, many classics and popularised genres in and outside of the arcade gaming sphere," he says.

Those that got to experience those games in their natural habitat share that sentiment. "That Capcom name behind the arcades was something that you just didn't question, it was the best that there was at the time," says Dimitris. For Gmintyfresh, the depth of the company's contribution to the scene stands out. "Their arcade games are still infinitely playable and uniquely identifiable. Whilst there is no denying games like *Strider*, *Forgotten Worlds*, and *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* are true arcade classics, lesser-known games like *Varth*, *3 Wonders* and *Cyberbots* should also be sampled for similar levels of playability and fun."

"Capcom *is* arcade gaming for me," says Nic. "Their titles defined my childhood obsessions, their artwork was head and shoulders above the competition, their gameplay perfected for the coin-op. From an industry point of view, I think they pushed arcade gameplay forwards more times than anyone else during the golden era. Without Capcom I believe the arcades of the Nineties would have become little more than a novelty alongside penny pushers and grabber machines." Ben, who continues to work on updates to the Capcom Home Arcade, feels similarly. "They were the finest arcade-game developer and manufacturer of all time. This, in my opinion, is due to the consistency of bringing exceptionally high-quality product to market. During those days they didn't put a foot wrong."

Fortunately, there are plenty of ways to bring the arcade experience home today, from the classic compilations that dosboxfalco grew up with to the Capcom Home Arcade, and now *Capcom Arcade Stadium*. Whatever your decision, you can't go wrong – no matter where you experience them, Capcom's arcade games are games that defined an era. ✱

"CAPCOM STAFF FAVOURITES

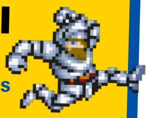
HIDEKATSU TETSUDA

■ 19XX: The War Against Destiny

The difficulty level is just right – you can just about get by on your reflexes but there's also a lot of depth. If you want to get a high score you need the skill and precision to pull off charged shots and well-timed bombs in order to weaken but not destroy enemies and medals, then take them all out in one go. I think the visuals and effects are really cool and among the best in Capcom's arcade games."

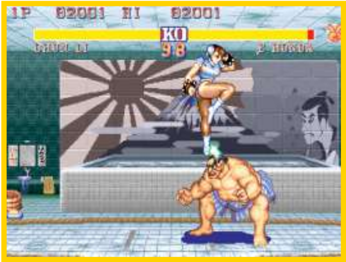
"CAPCOM STAFF FAVOURITES

HIDENORI TAKAYA

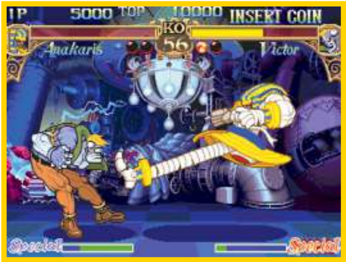


■ Ghouls 'N Ghosts

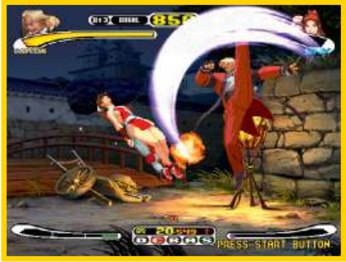
The unforgiving gameplay where one mistake could cost your life was well-balanced with the fun sense of reward you felt from becoming more skilled at the game through repeated attempts. The variety of weapons available meant that you could retry tough stages with a different one and maybe finish them that way, which gave the game a lot of depth."



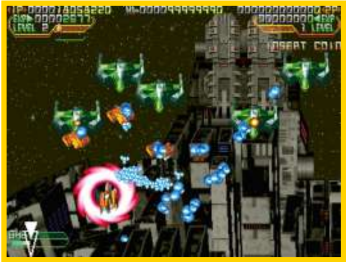
» [Arcade] *Street Fighter II* was a revolutionary game, and arguably added years to the lifespan of arcades as a whole.



» [Arcade] *Darkstalkers* was a successful new implementation of the fighting game formula and received its own sequels.



» [Arcade] A collaboration with long-time rival SNK managed to draw some interest in the declining fighting game scene.



» [Arcade] The CPS II had a long life thanks to games like *Mars Matrix* that just needed to shift a lot of sprites.

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CAPCOM ARCADE STADIUM

BRINGING THE ARCADE EXPERIENCE HOME TO THE SWITCH

If you find yourself hankering to play some of the games covered in this feature and happen to be in possession of a Nintendo Switch, Capcom has got you covered with its new *Capcom Arcade Stadium* compilation, releasing in February 2021. Unlike most compilations, *Capcom Arcade Stadium* takes a modular approach. The main package is free to download and allows you to try out the software with *1943: The Battle Of Midway*. Beyond that, *Ghosts 'N Goblins* can be purchased as an individual title, and the remaining games are available in bundles of ten, or a single bundle of thirty.

The *Dawn Of The Arcade* pack covers games from 1984 to 1988 and will delight shmup fans, as it includes *Vulgus, 1942, Section Z, Legendary Wings* and *Forgotten Worlds*, as well as *Pirate Ship Higemaru, Commando, Trojan, Bionic Commando* and *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*. The CPS-focused *Arcade Revolution* pack runs from 1989 to 1992 and contains *Strider, Dynasty Wars, Final Fight, 1941: Counter Attack, Mercs, Mega Twins, Carrier Air Wing, Street Fighter II: The World Warrior, Captain Commando* and *Varth: Operation Thunderstorm*. Finally, the *Arcade Evolution* pack runs from 1992 to 2001 and includes *Warriors Of Fate, Street Fighter II Turbo, Super Street Fighter II Turbo, Armored Warriors, Cyberbots: Full Metal Madness, 19XX: The War Against Destiny, Battle Circuit, Giga Wing, 1944: The Loop Master* and *Progear*.

Capcom Arcade Stadium includes a number of features that are particularly desirable in any retro collection. Save states are present and correct, with saving and loading possible at any time, and a rewind feature is available for the correction of any careless gameplay mistakes. Of course, if you'd rather not abuse save states and rewinding, you may wish to take advantage of the adjustable difficulty levels. It's also possible to adjust the speed of gameplay on the fly, which is a feature that we don't often see. A variety of display options are also available. As well as the standard option for scanlines, it's possible to simulate CRT curvature, and these options are available independently of one another. Additionally, you can play the game on a number of 3D-rendered versions of arcade machines, including Capcom's own cabinets such as the Impress and the Mini Cute. It's also possible to rotate the display, which is useful for portrait-oriented games like *1942*.

If you fancy some competition or a helping hand in the harder co-op games, local multiplayer is available. Leaderboards are also available online, and Capcom is promising to add some new spice to old favourites with its weekly special challenges, in which you can try to achieve high scores while playing a game upside down or at high-speed. With what appears to be a very comprehensive feature set and a great selection of games across the packages, we're really looking forward to getting our hands on *Capcom Arcade Stadium* and will be sure to cover the finished product in a future issue.

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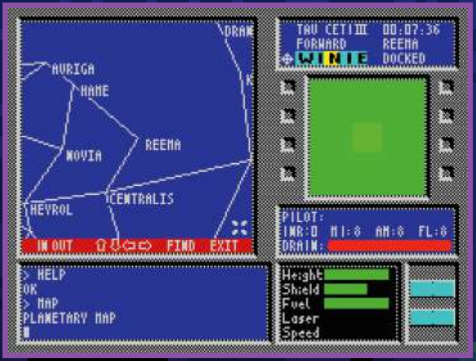
THE EVOLUTION OF TAU CETI

Inspired by sci-fi books, astronomy and Gyron, Pete Cooke designed the hit 3D shoot-'em-up Tau Ceti, followed by a string of popular third-person hybrid shooters. Pete charts the evolution of Tau Ceti, its sequels and its spiritual successors

WORDS BY RORY MILNE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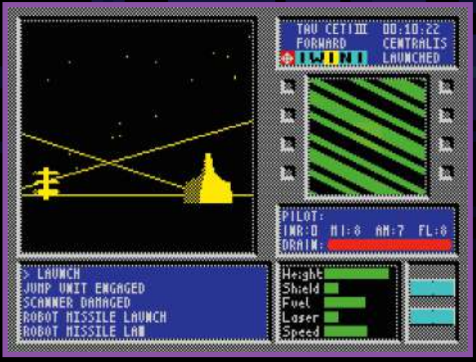
» [ZX Spectrum] At the time of its release, *Tau Ceti*'s interactive map was an extremely impressive feature.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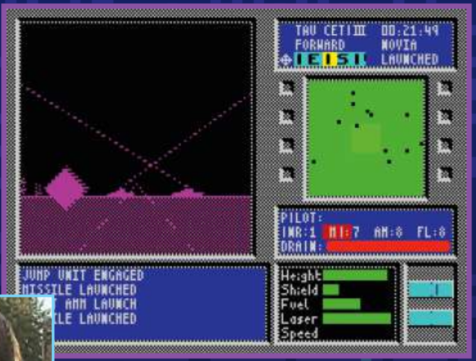
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» [ZX Spectrum] Always switch to infrared mode before starting a night time firefight in *Tau Ceti*.

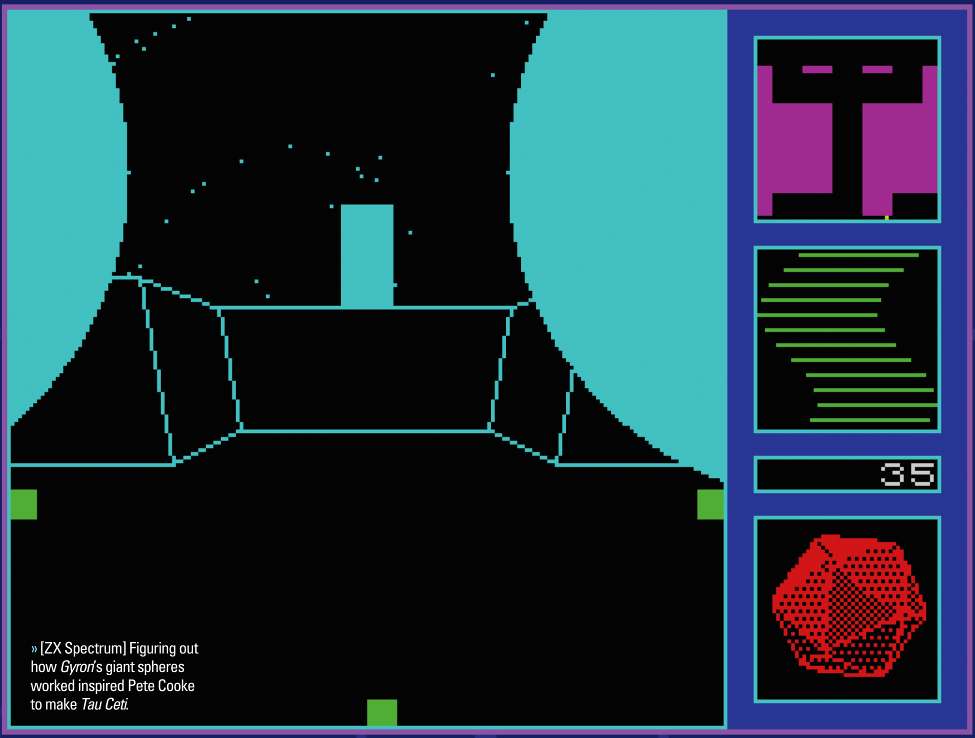
» Although best remembered for *Tau Ceti*, Pete Cooke made numerous classic games in the Eighties.

In spite of his love for science fiction, Pete Cooke didn't explore the genre with any of his early games. In fact, it wasn't until years later that he found a project that lent itself to a sci-fi storyline, and having done so he used his knowledge of astronomy to find a plausible setting – the planetary system of Tau Ceti. "I used to read a lot of science fiction, and Larry Niven was a particular favourite," Pete notes. "The book that really made me think was called *Ringworld*, and the idea in that was that civilisations in the future would maximise the amount of energy they could get from a sun by building a ring around it. My mum was interested in astronomy, and I picked up on that too, and *Tau Ceti*'s storyline came from all of that."

The epic back story that set up *Tau Ceti* was far from Pete's first consideration, however, and in fact his initial inspiration came from a pioneering 3D Spectrum title. "I looked at *Gyron*, and I saw these big spheres coming at you," Pete enthuses. "I thought 'how the hell have they done that?'. They couldn't be sprites; they wouldn't have had enough memory. So I looked at it, and they had just stored a table of numbers that only needed 100 bytes. They had drawn the spheres using that, and increased them in size by just scaling up the numbers."

Having worked out *Gyron*'s visual trickery, Pete refined the technique to make more solid-looking graphics. He felt they would work best in a shoot-'em-up, but he wasn't planning a simple shooter. "I thought that you didn't have to draw things all in one colour – like *Gyron*," Pete considers, "so I drew around 75% of an object in grey – and it jumped out. At that point it was a shadow. I thought 'bloody hell! That looks amazing! I've got to have a game using this'. Then of course you had to shoot things, because everything was about shooting back then! But I wanted a bit more, so I put a few other things in to have a bit more depth."

The cities in *Tau Ceti* were one area where Pete added sophistication, in that he defended them with more or less robots based on their importance rather than the order they were



» [ZX Spectrum] Figuring out how *Gyron*'s giant spheres worked inspired Pete Cooke to make *Tau Ceti*.

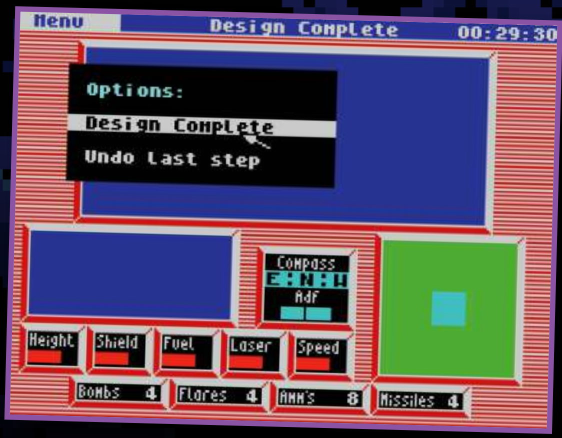
visited. "If you had a game that was too linear you could get stuck," Pete explains. "So I designed *Tau Ceti* so that if there was one city that you just couldn't do then you could do all of the other ones and come back to it later, or you could just not come back, but you wouldn't miss a load of stuff."

Of course, the ability to tackle *Tau Ceti*'s cities in any order also brought exploration into the game, and so Pete repurposed its code to render an interactive map. "There was navigation, which made you feel like there was a big world out there," Pete points out, "so the obvious thing was to have a map. It was something I could lever in without taking up too much memory, because it just patched into the game's code, and that meant it could be zoomed into. In those primitive days, it made a lot of difference having an interactive map."

> "There was no information on the map about how well defended a city was, you had to go there and find out"
>
> **PETE COOKE**

Having mapped out the robot-infested cities in his game, Pete gave players a side objective of finding cooling rods and deactivating a reactor with them. "It gave you something to do other than killing everything," Pete reasons. "It wasn't too difficult, but it meant that you had a reason to visit the cities. So you were collecting something, and I suppose that was coming from adventure games, where you would collect stuff and that enabled you to do something else. So I thought you could be collecting something in *Tau Ceti*."

Rather than making *Tau Ceti*'s mission an on-foot endeavour, Pete designed a vehicle called a skimmer for travelling to cities, which started off fully equipped rather than having to be upgraded. "The trouble was that you could go to any city, and it could be the toughest one," Pete reflects, "so if you had gone there first with a weak skimmer then you would have got hammered. If I'd put in a criteria that rated the cities then that might not have applied, and there would have been more to the game, but I don't think it occurred to me. So there was no information on the map about how well defended a city was, you had to go there and find out."



» [ZX Spectrum] When you design skimmers in *Academy* you select their capabilities and arrange their cockpit layouts.

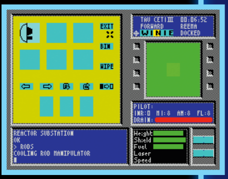
A further enhancement to Pete's shooter came in the form of day/night cycles, which led to the developer adding infrared sensors and flares to his game's skimmers to help players pilot them in the dark. "I think the infrared was mainly there because it was a doddle to do," Pete admits. "Because of the way the screen worked the colour and pixels were separate areas of memory. So the infrared took very little code, it was an easy thing to shoehorn in, and it was less boring than looking at yellow all the while."

On seeing the accolades showered on *Tau Ceti* by reviewers on its release, Pete's publisher CRL naturally wanted a sequel – and after working out its back story Pete named it *Academy*. "I thought *Academy* had to be mission-based," Pete remembers. "Again, I didn't want it to be a linear game; I wanted ▶

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

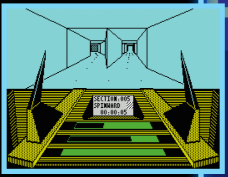
FROM REACTOR SHUTDOWNS AND MAZE-LIKE TUNNELS TO PERPLEXING PUZZLES

TAU CETI



Far from a simple shooter, *Tau Ceti* involves much more than just blasting enemies. Most notably, it sends you on a treasure hunt that takes in the whole of its expansive world, where you locate and assemble cooling rods hidden in buildings. You then use these to shut down a reactor.

MICRONAUT ONE



Although *Micronaut One* is primarily about exterminating parasites with electrical charges, its maze of tunnels provides a second challenge of navigating your way around as you pursue your targets. An in-game map makes this easier, but you have to mark points of interest on it yourself.

TOWER OF BABEL

The Sacrifice

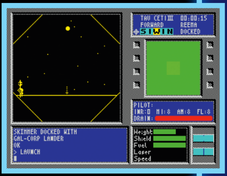
Each player character in *Tower Of Babel* performs an action that affects the objects and enemies in the game, but there's a secondary purpose to those actions. Essentially, you complete missions by clearing a path so that one of your characters can safely reach one or more locations.

> “I thought it could be some training thing, and that led to the idea of an academy where skimmer pilots were learning to do all these things”
>
> **PETE COOKE**

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: MODES OF TRAVEL

HOW SKIMMERS AND SCRIM-BLASTING CRAFT LED TO SPIDER-LIKE ROBOTS

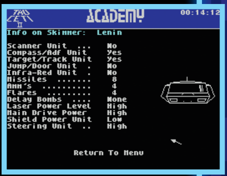
TAU CETI


TAU CETI III 00:00:15
FORWARD REENA
SIWIN DOCKED
PILOT:
INR:0 MI:8 AM:8 FL:8
DRAIN:
Height
Shield
Fuel
Laser
Speed

```
SKIMMER DOCKED WITH
GAL-CORP LANDER
OK
> LAUNCH
```

Think of *Tau Ceti*’s skimmers as armed and shielded hovercraft equipped with infrared night sights and 360 degree scanners. Skimmers have two modes: ground mode, where you punch in commands while in buildings; and flight mode, where you take off and have direct control of the craft.

ACADEMY

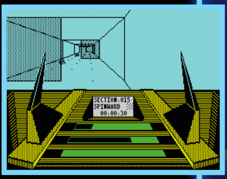

TAU CETI II
ACADEMY
00:14:12
Return To Menu

```
Info on Skimmer:   Lenin

Scanner Unit  ...    No
Compass/Adf Unit     Yes
Target/Track Unit    Yes
Jump/Door Unit  .    No
Infra-Red Unit  .    No
Missiles  .......     8
AMM's  ..........     4
Flares  .........     4
Delay Bombs  ....    None
Laser Power Level    High
Main Drive Power     High
Shield Power Unit    Low
Steering Unit  ..    High
```

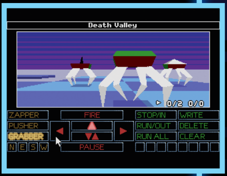
Academy has three pre-designed skimmers to *Tau Ceti*’s one, and each of the sequel’s stock models has distinct strengths and weaknesses. You can also build your own. The capabilities of your skimmers depend on how well you equip them, but you have to adhere to weight and cost limits.

MICRONAUT ONE

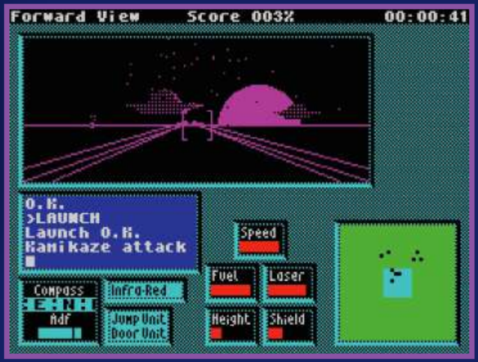


The craft in *Micronaut One* are built for speed rather than manoeuvrability; they’re great at veering left and right, but you can’t turn them around. Instead you have to stop and switch between forward and rear view, and as you’re in a maze this is more than a little disorientating.

TOWER OF BABEL

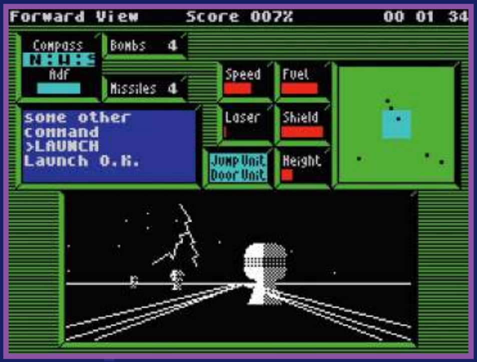

Death Valley
0/2 0/0
ZAPPER
PUSHER
GRABBER
N E S W
FIRE
PAUSE
STOP/IN
WRITE
RUN/OUT
DELETE
RUN ALL
CLEAR

In *Tower Of Babel*, you control not one but three robot spiders by entering commands using a point-and-click interface. You see the results through the eyes of your currently selected spider, each of which has a unique ability to either push, zap or grab whatever’s in front of them.


Forward View Score 003% 00:00:41
Speed
Fuel
Laser
Compass
E N W
Adf
Infra-Red
Jump Unit
Door Unit
Height
Shield

```
O.K.
>LAUNCH
Launch O.K.
Kamikaze attack
```

» [ZX Spectrum] The infrared night sights in *Academy* don’t work on planets that have a red sun.


Forward View Score 007% 00 01 34
Compass
N W S
Adf
Bombs 4
Missiles 4
Speed
Fuel
Laser
Shield
Jump Unit
Door Unit
Height

```
some other
command
>LAUNCH
Launch O.K.
```

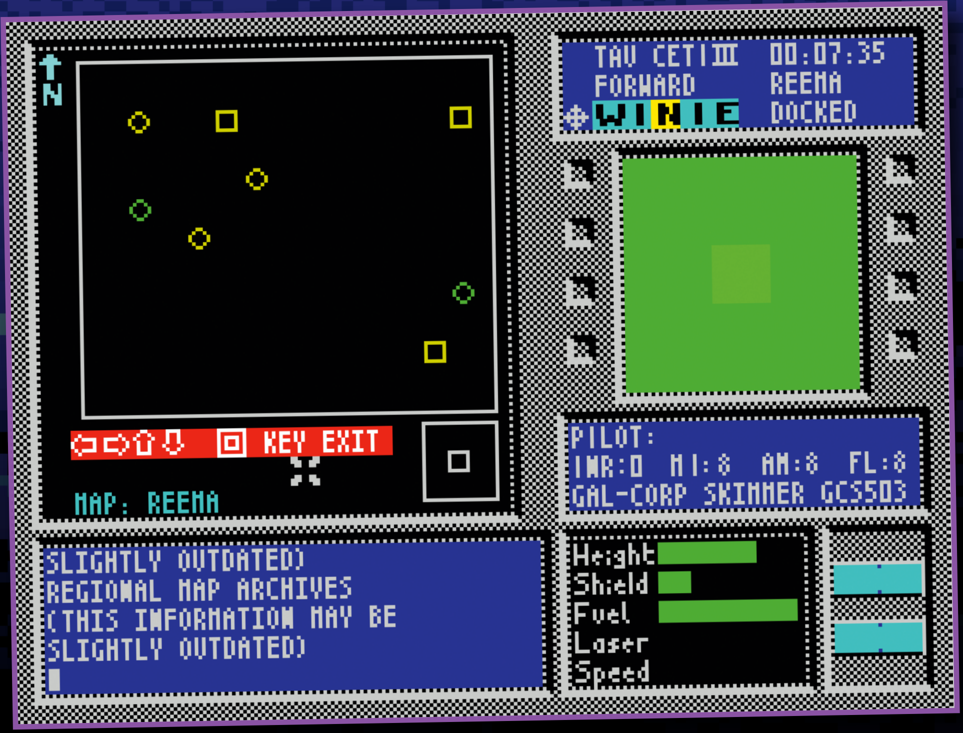
» [ZX Spectrum] The different worlds in *Academy* are affected by different environmental conditions, such as severe weather.

▶ you to have the ability to chop and change. I thought it could be some training thing, and that led to the idea of an academy where skimmer pilots were learning to do all these things. So they were taking part in missions, and there were different skimmers that they could be flying.”

Before creating three stock skimmers, each with unique defence, attack and performance capabilities, Pete was inspired to let players build and equip their own. “I’d read an article on a game called *Pinball Construction Set*, where you could build a pinball table by dragging and dropping things, and I thought ‘what a brilliant idea!’” Pete exclaims. “It occurred to me that the way *Tau Ceti* worked was that bits of the screen were different things, so I thought you could lay that out how you wanted and design your own skimmer.”

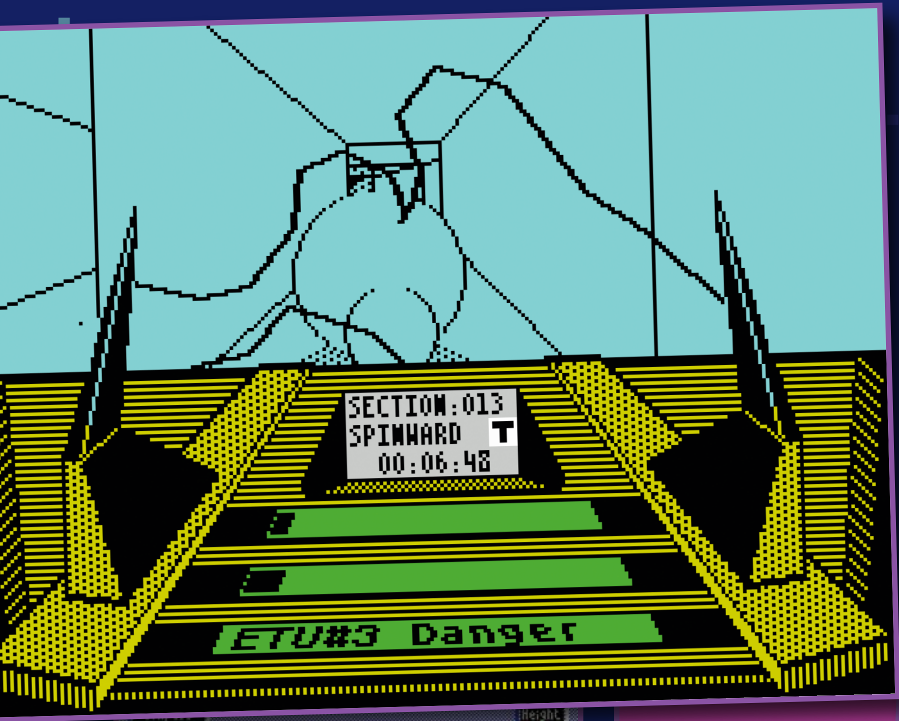
Additional distinctions from *Tau Ceti* followed, as Pete opted to base *Academy*’s missions on fixed areas of multiple worlds rather than the entirety of a single planet. “There wasn’t room for big worlds for you to just fly around in,” Pete acknowledges, “but as long as the missions were pre-designed you could get more in a single load. It was very visual as well, and as soon as you started playing around the skimmers looked different too. You got bored looking at *Tau Ceti*, because it always looked the same, but *Academy* could actually look very different.”

In order to further distinguish *Academy*, Pete made his sequel more atmospheric by adding visual effects that depicted the environmental conditions on its many planets. “It was a question of what could I change to make it more visually exciting,” Pete recalls. “Once I got away from it being a single world I could have different coloured suns, and if it was a red dwarf then everything was red, why the hell not? The lighting and stuff weren’t too expensive, so I threw them in too. But I

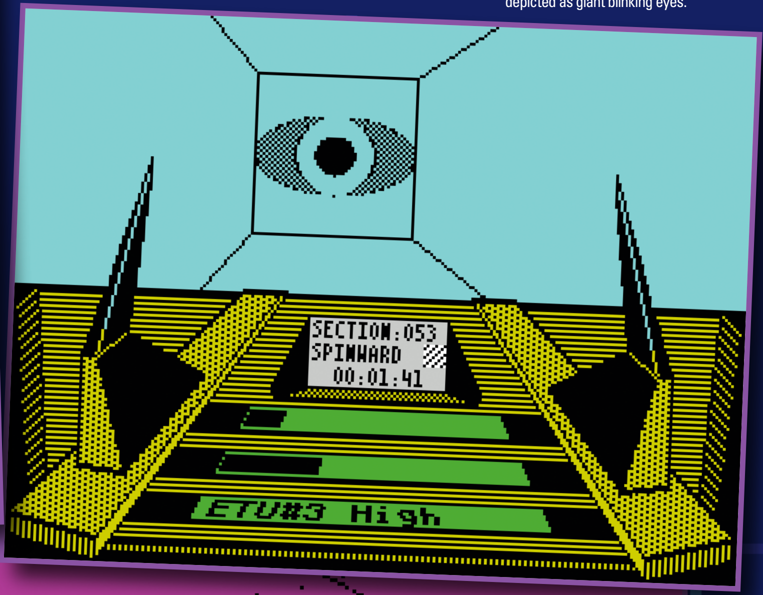

N
KEY EXIT
MAP: REENA
TAU CETI III 00:07:35
FORWARD REENA
WINIE DOCKED
PILOT:
INR:0 MI:8 AM:8 FL:8
GAL-CORP SKIMMER GC3503
Height
Shield
Fuel
Laser
Speed

```
SLIGHTLY OUTDATED
REGIONAL MAP ARCHIVES
(THIS INFORMATION MAY BE
SLIGHTLY OUTDATED)
```

» [ZX Spectrum] The city-level maps in *Tau Ceti Special Edition* are unique to the enhanced title.



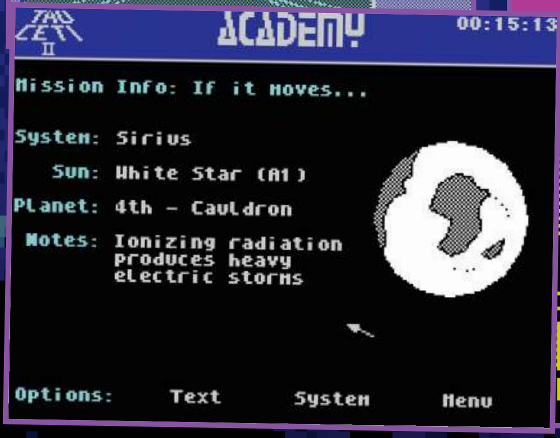
» [ZX Spectrum] You can't kill the scrim in *Micronaut One* until they evolve into their larvae form.



» [ZX Spectrum] Due to their biological nature, *Micronaut One*'s energy transfer units are depicted as giant blinking eyes.

Missiles 8
Height
Shield
Fuel
Laser
Speed

some other command
>LAUNCH
Launch O.K.



Mission Info: If it moves...

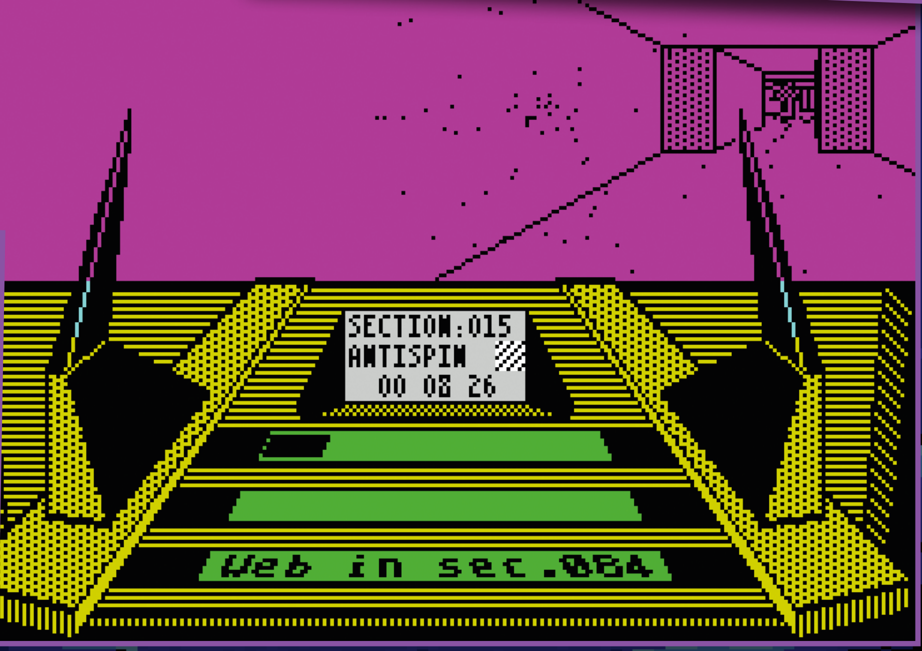
System: Sirius

Sun: White Star (A1)

Planet: 4th - Cauldron

Notes: Ionizing radiation produces heavy electric storms

Options: Text System Menu



didn't want them to be arbitrary, so I tied them into the narrative and the gameplay."

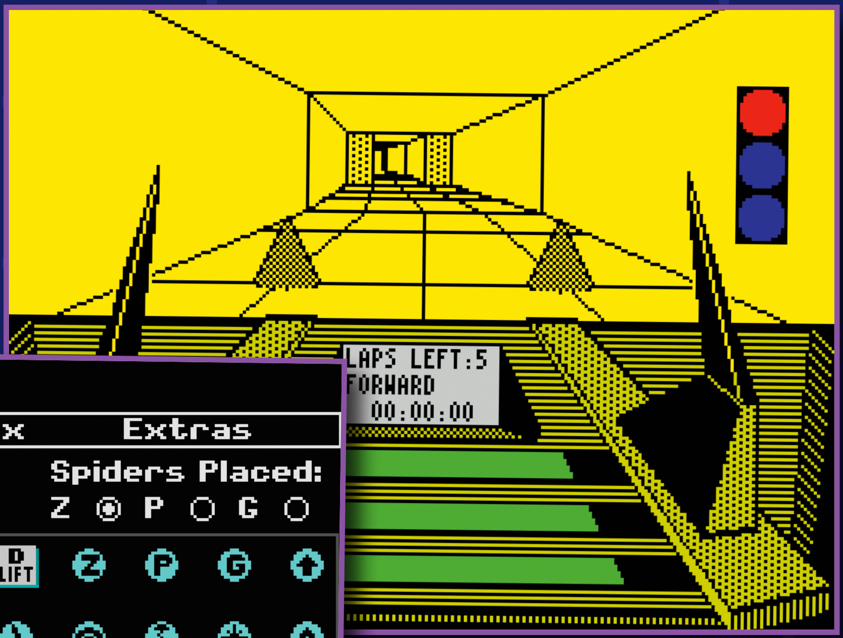
On receiving review copies, impressed critics agreed that *Academy* had improved on *Tau Ceti*. A 128K version was planned, although it never materialised, but Pete addressed this oversight with his subsequent project. "The thing about *Tau Ceti* was there was no room left; the 48K Spectrum was full," Pete recollects. "But *Tau Ceti Special Edition* was for the Spectrum 128, so that meant we could put stuff in that wouldn't fit otherwise. I remember there were a lot more graphics in it, and there was background information that explained stuff."

As well as background information, *Tau Ceti Special Edition* incorporated city-level maps that the original lacked to help players find the buildings that the game's cooling rods were hidden in – including two new structures that hadn't appeared in *Tau Ceti*. "We were just thinking we could put lots of stuff in there that would be fun," Pete says of the city maps. "But the original was very playable, and you didn't want to unbalance it, so there were libraries and outposts that weren't in the original, so that there was a balance there."

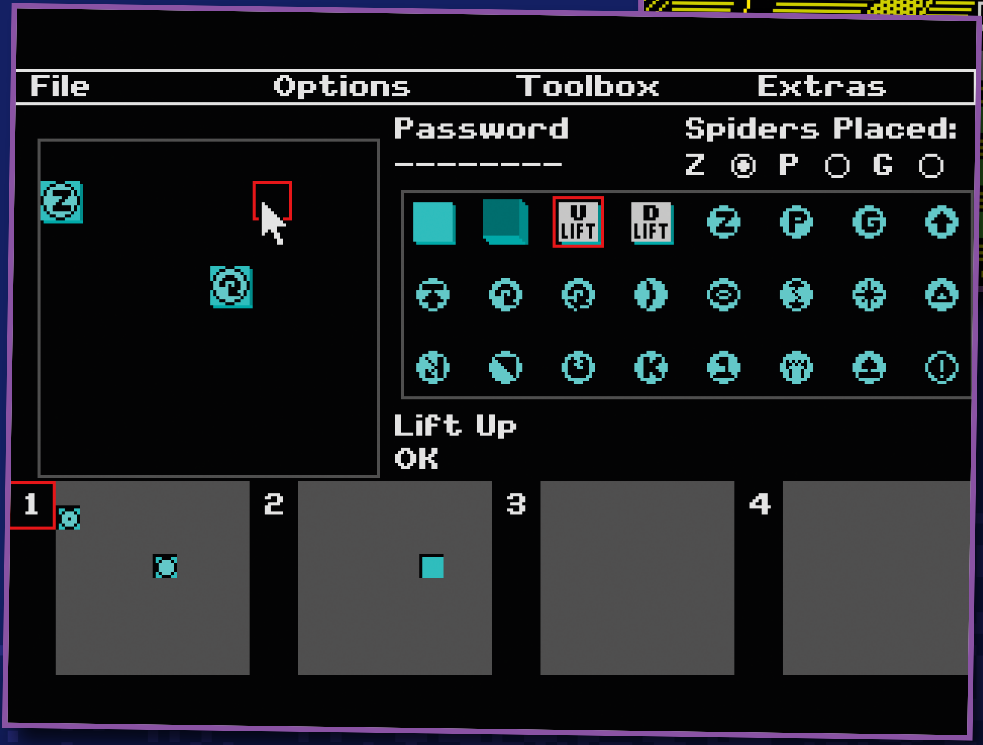
The much-expanded *Tau Ceti* went down well with Spectrum 128 owners, although the enhanced title went almost unnoticed by the games press. Pete's next third-person shooter – *Micronaut One* – left the *Tau Ceti* franchise behind in favour of 3D tunnels. "They were basically a load of rectangles nested inside each other that gradually moved sideways when they curved," Pete contemplates. "They ran like the wind, which was amazing for 3D on the Spectrum. You couldn't turn, because you had to be looking down the tunnels or everything broke, so there were restrictions, but they worked, so I thought about what a game based on tunnels could be."

The direction Pete took was to make a network of tunnels for players to navigate their way through, and he filled them with creatures that took multiple shots to take down. "The tunnels represented a sort of maze that you needed to track," Pete reviews, "and there were maps like *Tau Ceti*, where you could mark stuff and come back to it, and find your way around. I also

Softly Softly!
0/3
ZAPPER
PUSHER
GRABBER
N E S W
FIRE
PAUSE
STOP/IN
RUN/OUT
RUN ALL
WRITE
DELETE
CLEAR

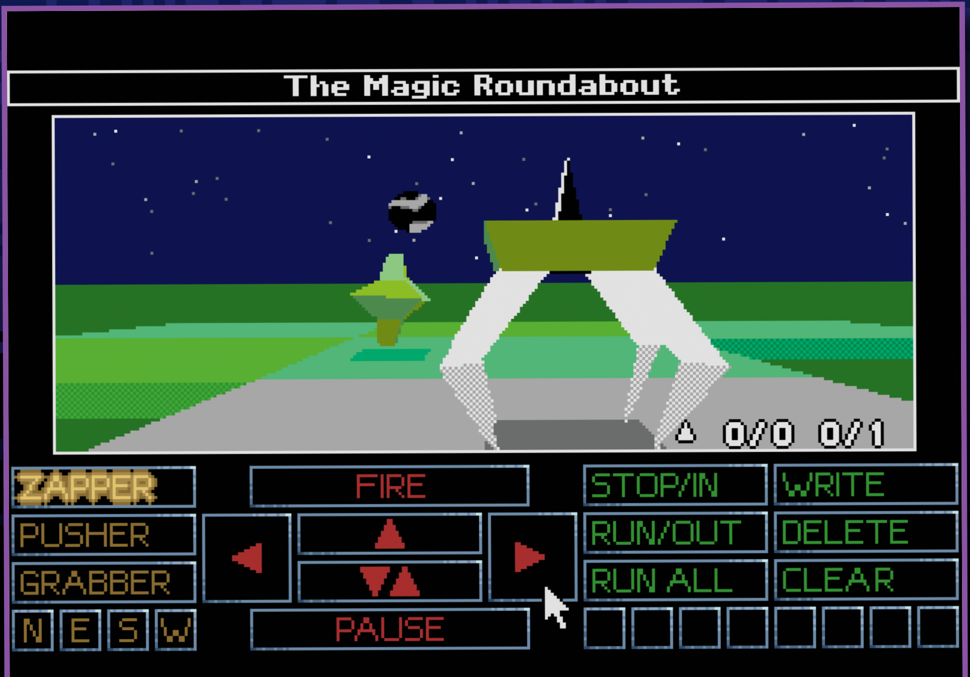

LAPS LEFT:5
FORWARD
00:00:00

» [ZX Spectrum] The sheer speed of *Tau Ceti* convinced Pete Cooke to give his shooter a racing mode.


File
Options
Toolbox
Extras
Password

Spiders Placed:
Z ● P ○ G ○
U LIFT
D LIFT
Lift Up
OK
1
2
3
4

» [Atari ST] The level designer in *Tower Of Babel* feels a lot like *Academy*'s skimmer designer.


The Magic Roundabout
0/0 0/1
ZAPPER
PUSHER
GRABBER
N E S W
FIRE
PAUSE
STOP/IN
RUN/OUT
RUN ALL
WRITE
DELETE
CLEAR

» [Atari ST] You shoot things in *Tower Of Babel* using the zapper – a robot with a laser attachment.

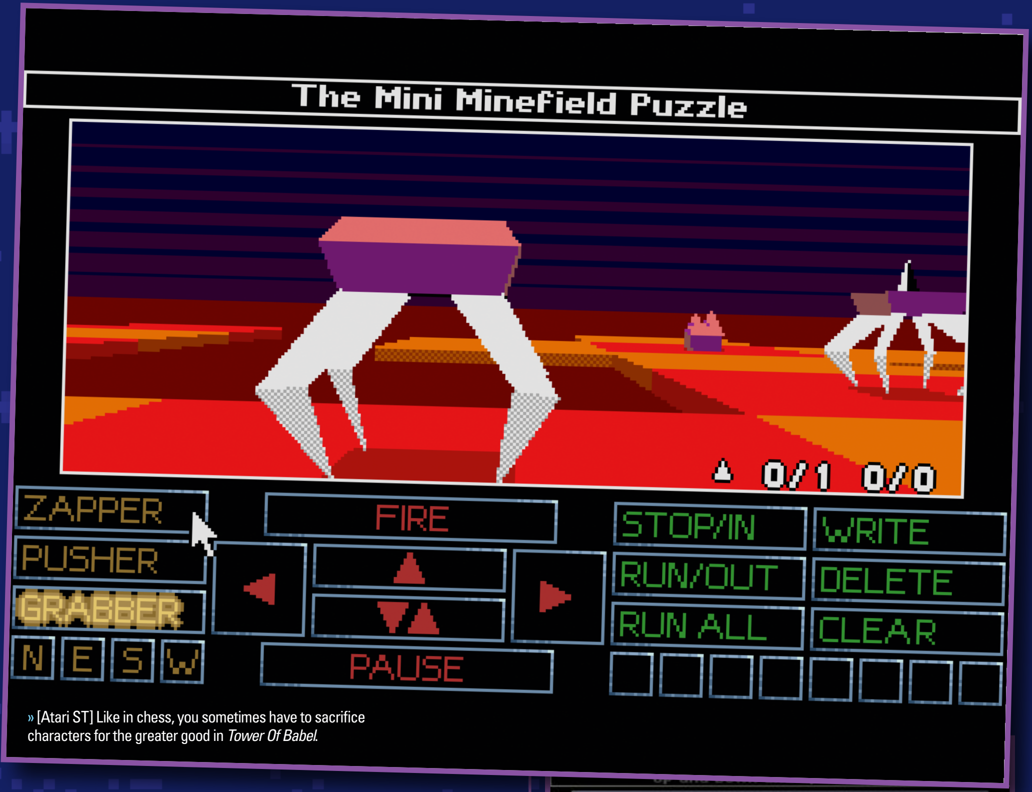
used the idea from *Tau Ceti* where you had solid shapes; I got the larvae out of that, and put them in there."

Keen for *Micronaut One* to stand out from his *Tau Ceti* series, Pete started its opponents off as eggs that then evolved into increasingly dangerous forms. "The *Alien* movies would have been at the back of my mind, because they were great films!" Pete beams. "I remember wanting to get away from *Tau Ceti* and go for creatures that were organic rather than machines. You could try to get them at an earlier stage because it might be easier, or you might wait for them to get to a later stage."

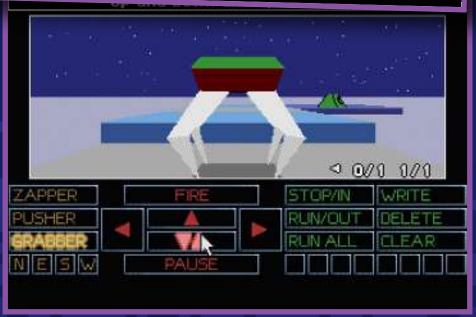
Another layer of gameplay Pete added took *Micronaut One*'s health mechanics from a simple energy bar to a sub-game of keeping energy transfer units at a safe level. "I was trying to add strategy to the game, otherwise it would have been too simple," Pete observes. "It meant there was this transfer thing, where you could bank energy somewhere and get it later. You had to be aware of how much energy you had and how much you needed. You might even decide you didn't need energy and get out of the way of an energy swarm. So there was more decision making going on."

But besides giving *Micronaut One* more depth, Pete also stripped back his tunnel-based shooter

But Cameras Give The Game Away (Maze 1)
READY
0/1 0/1
ZAPPER
PUSHER
GRABBER
N E S W
FIRE
PAUSE
STOP/IN
RUN/OUT
RUN ALL
WRITE
DELETE
CLEAR



» [Atari ST] Like in chess, you sometimes have to sacrifice characters for the greater good in *Tower Of Babel*.



» [Atari ST] There are some handy lifts that you need to use in *Tower Of Babel*.

to make a second mode based on high-speed races against the clock. “The bit where you raced down the tunnels was just because it was a good excuse to watch stuff flying by,” Pete grins. “I remember when I first got it running I used to race around a bit, and the 3D ran so nicely. You just didn’t see that very often on a Spectrum, so I made a little race down the tunnels. It didn’t take up any more memory, because it just used the same code, so why not?”

Micronaut One’s different modes were noted by reviewers when the game was released, and high ratings were handed out across the board. Two years passed before Pete’s next third-person title – *Tower Of Babel*, a puzzle game with three robot heroes. “I settled on there being three things you could do: you could push things, zap things and grab things,” Pete says.

“I had three robots, because if you just had one robot that could do all three things then there would have been no puzzles. The game was about getting this robot *here* so you could get that robot *there* so you could get the third robot to another place to do something. There were also hoppers that hopped around, and a caterpillar thing that crawled along, but all they did was get in the way.”

> “I had three robots, because if you just had one robot that could do all three things then there would have been no puzzles”
>
> **PETE COOKE**

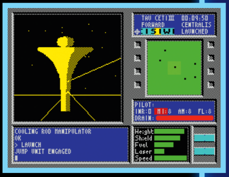
Having given his three different robots different abilities, Pete next coded up a tool to build the puzzles that would provide *Tower Of Babel* with its core gameplay. “I put together a level designer – which was in the game – and I did all the levels myself, apart from a few,” Pete explains. “Nigel Kenward – the artist – designed some for me, which was nice, because he had a different eye for it. The idea with the level designer was that players could design their own puzzles. I was thinking that would give the game much more of a lifetime.”

A key aspect of *Tower Of Babel*’s puzzles was dispatching opponents with the game’s zapper robot, although Pete stopped short of making his game an out and out shooter. “With hindsight I did what I liked!” Pete laughs. “I think *Tower Of Babel* was the last game I designed, because it became apparent that what I liked wasn’t what other people bought. I was less into shooting stuff by then; this was a thinking game. It was about 3D perception with a puzzle-based element. That’s what was interesting me at the time.”

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: SCI-FI FOES

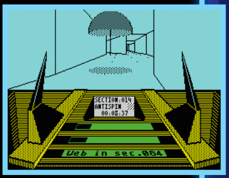
ROGUE ROBOTS, MUTATING PARASITES, WATCHERS, WIPERS AND WORMS

TAU CETI



The planet that *Tau Ceti* takes place on has been taken over by malfunctioning robots, and although some of them are benign, the ones that are hostile are armed and dangerous. The latter fit into two categories: mobile UFO-like hunter ships and static but heavily armed laser towers.

MICRONAUT ONE



Micronaut One’s opponents – the scrim – differ from *Tau Ceti*’s robots in that they’re organic and unarmed, but they wreak havoc on the game’s bio-computers. They begin as indestructible eggs then evolve into vulnerable slow-moving larvae and speedy jellyflies – which lay more eggs!

TOWER OF BABEL

Zapper To The Rescue

Like *Tau Ceti*, *Tower Of Babel* pits you against robots, although those that are armed can take you out with one shot, so don’t expect firefights. There are unarmed models too, like obstructive worms and watchers, and wipers that remove squares from the game’s chessboard-like levels.

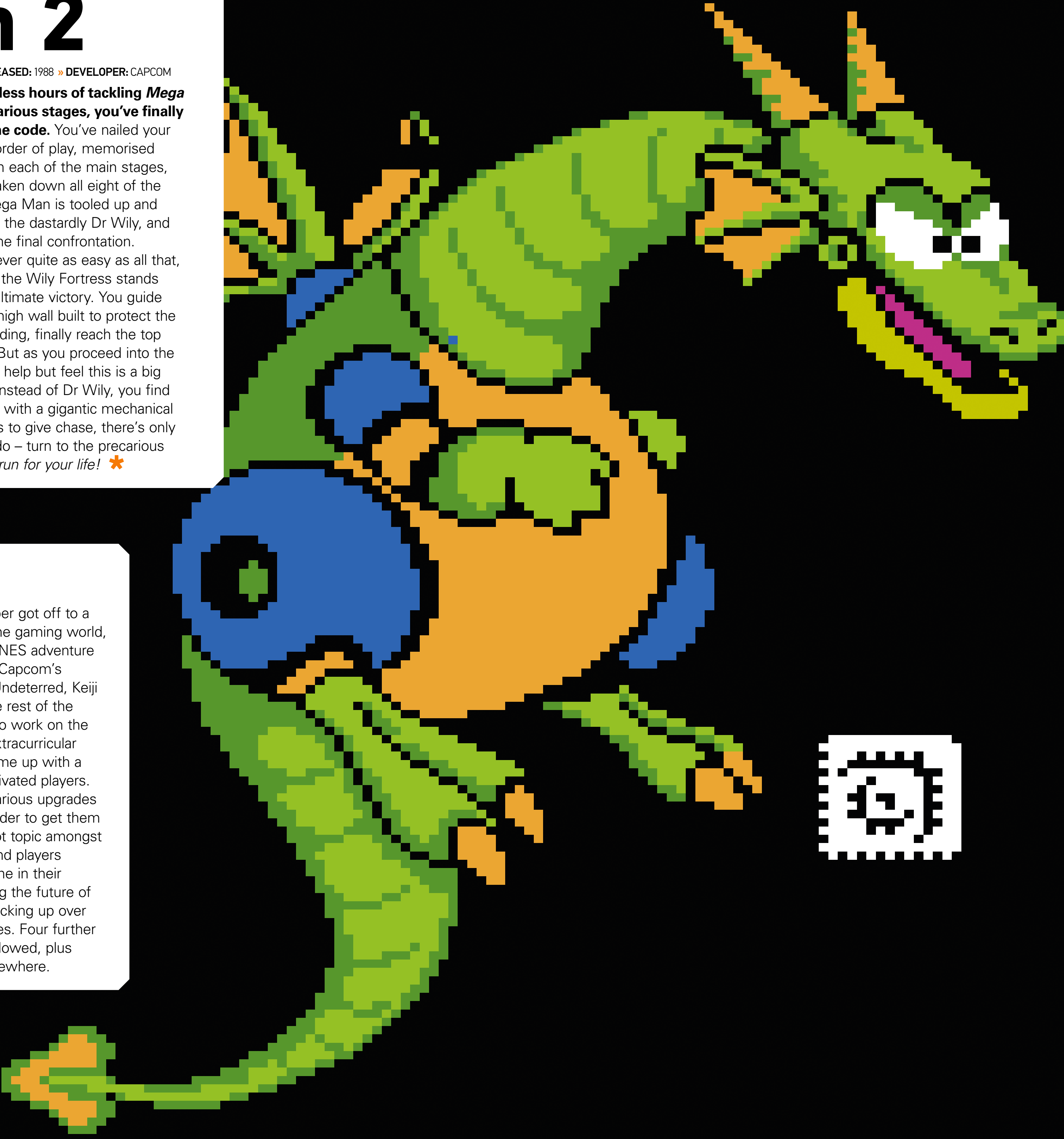
Decades later, Pete is modest when asked to review the series of hybrid shooters that began with *Tau Ceti*. He has ideas for a modern version, but admits that he isn’t keen on the herculean effort that it would require. “The 3D effect in *Tau Ceti* was nice, and *Academy* was a follow-up that at least was different,” Pete assesses. “*Micronaut One* wasn’t as open as *Tau Ceti* or *Academy*, so there wasn’t as much that I could do with it, but I was really pleased with *Tower Of Babel*. I guess a new *Tau Ceti* would be multiplayer and set in a universe instead of just a planet, but I’d need a team of 40 people and a couple of years to do it!” ✱

Mega Man 2

» **PLATFORM:** NES » **RELEASED:** 1988 » **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM

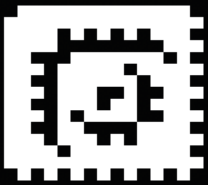
After countless hours of tackling *Mega Man 2*'s various stages, you've finally cracked the code. You've nailed your preferred order of play, memorised every sneaky trap in each of the main stages, and you've finally taken down all eight of the Robot Masters. Mega Man is tooled up and ready to go take on the dastardly Dr Wily, and you can't wait for the final confrontation.

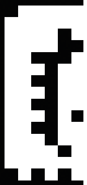
Of course, it's never quite as easy as all that, as the challenge of the Wily Fortress stands between you and ultimate victory. You guide Mega Man up the high wall built to protect the entrance of the building, finally reach the top and steel yourself. But as you proceed into the darkness, you can't help but feel this is a big trap – and indeed, instead of Dr Wily, you find yourself confronted with a gigantic mechanical dragon. As it begins to give chase, there's only one thing you can do – turn to the precarious path of blocks and *run for your life!* *



BIO

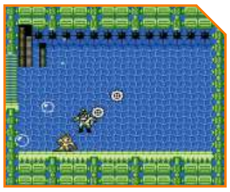
The Blue Bomber got off to a rocky start in the gaming world, with his debut NES adventure failing to meet Capcom's expectations. Undeterred, Keiji Inafune and the rest of the team decided to work on the sequel as an extracurricular project, and came up with a game that captivated players. Mega Man's various upgrades and the best order to get them in became a hot topic amongst NES players, and players bought the game in their droves, securing the future of the series by picking up over 1.5 million copies. Four further NES games followed, plus many more elsewhere.





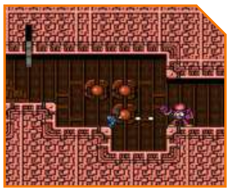
MORE CLASSIC MEGA MAN 2 MOMENTS

Heavy Metal



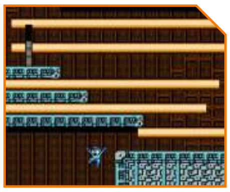
Getting any upgrade in the *Mega Man* games is typically exciting, as you try to work out how best to employ it, but the Metal Blade is something else. Suddenly, our hero gains access to a powerful weapon with multi-directional aiming, a huge advantage over the regular Buster that some fans think is actually *too* good.

See The Light



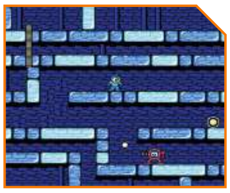
As you're making your way through a corridor, you meet this rather hot-headed fellow. Thinking nothing of your adversary, you fire off a few shots, destroy him and suddenly find yourself plunged into total darkness. That flame on his bonce was the only thing illuminating the stage – a very inventive move.

Quickly, Quickly!



Quickman's stage is an absolute nightmare, with beams crashing in from the side of the screen with absolutely no warning, giving you no chance to react. The result is that the area relies heavily on memorisation, which doesn't feel great – but let us tell you, the relief when you finally pass it is just utter bliss.

A-Maze-Zing



Flashman's stage begins with something quite unlike anything else you'll have seen in *Mega Man 2*, a maze-style section with plenty of routes to take and no shortage of wrong turnings, particularly if you don't yet have Crash Bombs that let you smash through the weaker walls. It's not a long stage, but is a fun one.

SO YOU WANT TO COLLECT...

MASTER SYSTEM GAMES

It's rare for the UK to be the best place to hunt down classic console games, but the popularity of Sega's 8-bit console in the region makes it an outlier. If you're planning to dive in, this guide to the console's classics and heavy hitters is for you

Words by Nick Thorpe

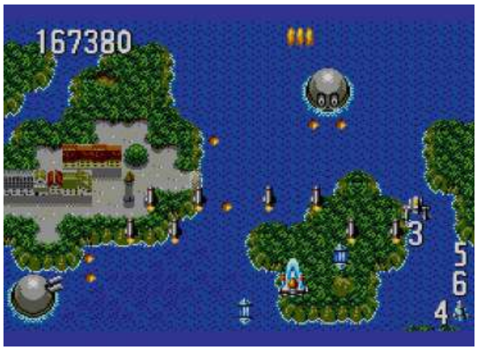
POWER IS MONEY

POWER STRIKE II

DEVELOPER:	COMPILE
RELEASE:	1993

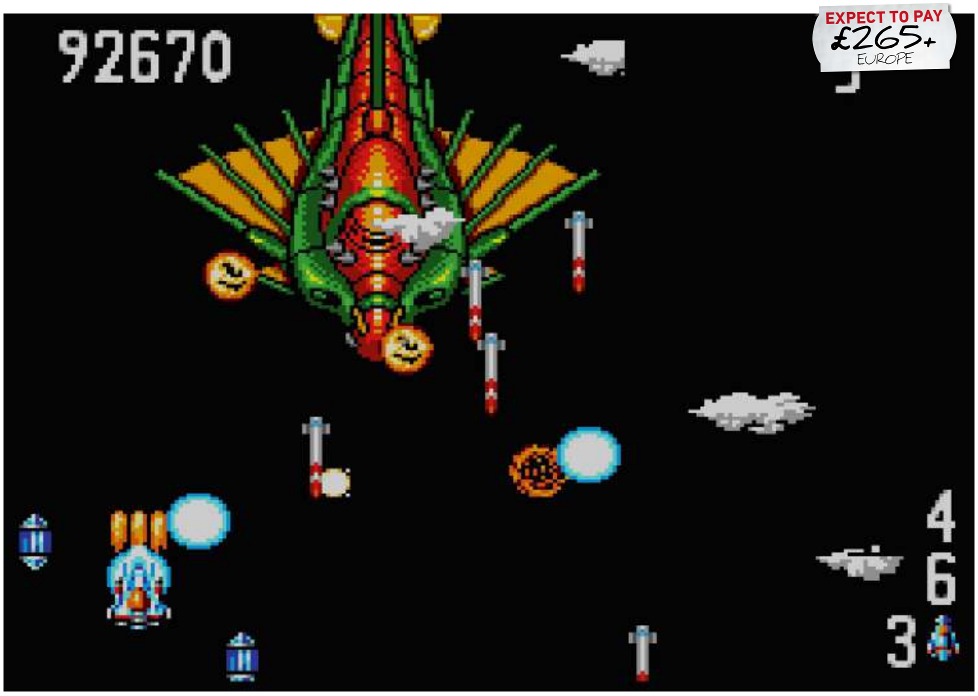
■ It's the early Thirties, and financial collapse has driven many to take to the skies in airships and engage in piracy, so your job is to get into your retro-futuristic plane and bring in the most notorious criminals for big bounties. In practice, that means you'll be doing vertical shooting in the same way as the original *Power Strike*, which was a localised version of the first game in the expansive (and now expensive) *Aleste* series.

Power Strike II was released late in the console's life and was exclusive to a single region, meaning that supply is limited – other 1993 Master System releases like *Buggy Run* and *Masters Of Combat* are also expensive. But *Power Strike II* is also very good and arguably the best shoot-'em-up on the Master System, driving the price higher still. Thankfully, *Power Strike II* is included on M2's recent *Aleste Collection* for PS4 and Switch, which represents a far more affordable way to acquire the game – especially if it eventually gets released outside of Japan.



» [Master System] *Power Strike II* is graphically impressive, as it's speedy and has loads going on.

EXPECT TO PAY
£265+
EUROPE



» [Master System] Unusual boss designs are standard as the usual *Aleste* space setting has been ditched.

FULL POWER

Why the original *Power Strike* could also drain your wallet

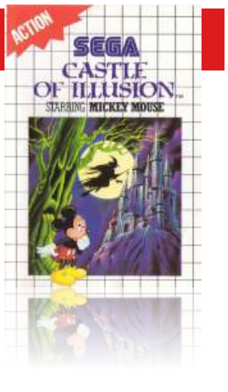
Power Strike isn't a particularly cheap game in any territory, but it's particularly expensive in North America because Sega decided to use *Power Strike* as the test case for a new model of software distribution. This 'special edition' was offered exclusively via mail order, advertised in the Team Sega newsletter, meaning only a remarkably select group of people ever had the opportunity to buy the game. These copies can be identified by rather cheap looking blue and white covers, and can sell for £110 or more when complete.

In Europe, *Power Strike* was a standard release, with a full colour cover featuring different art to the American version. It isn't hugely common, so it can fetch a good price – £75 or more if complete. In Japan, where it was released as *Aleste*, the game costs upwards of £35 when boxed with its manual.

THE REAL DEAL

CASTLE OF ILLUSION STARRING MICKEY MOUSE

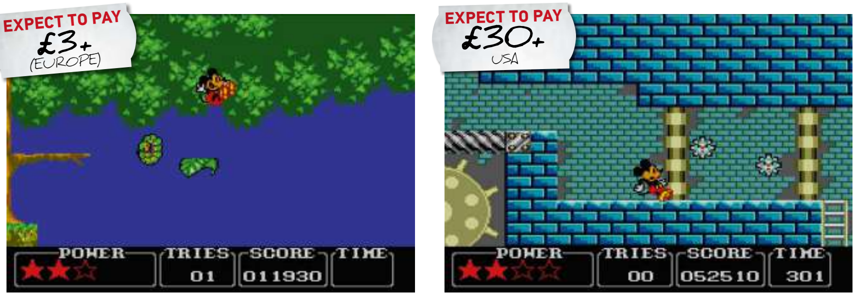
DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASE: 1991



■ By 1991, the presence of the Mega Drive had shifted the Master System's audience to the budget conscious consumer, and younger children. You wouldn't know that from playing *Castle Of Illusion*, though – this Disney-licensed game is a totally different prospect to its 16-bit counterpart, and it's arguably the more challenging of the two games. It's just as good though, with lovely visuals and some well-designed stages from a team of platform game experts. The game sold by the bucketload back in the early Nineties, so there are enough copies out there that it's very cheap and will make a brilliant start to your Master System collection. However, the North American release bears a different cover and is more expensive, owing to arriving late in the console's regional lifespan.

EXPECT TO PAY £3+ (EUROPE)

EXPECT TO PAY £30+ USA



» [Master System] While it shares themes with the Mega Drive game, the level design and mechanics here are totally different.

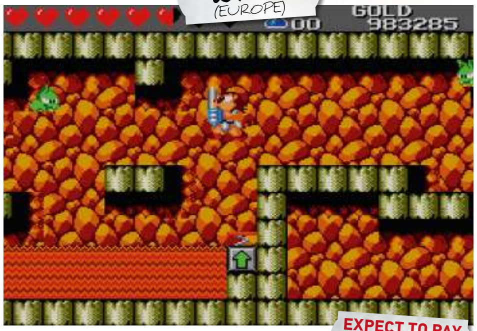
WONDERFUL VALUE

WONDER BOY III: THE DRAGON'S TRAP

DEVELOPER: WESTONE
RELEASE: 1989

■ If you're looking to grab all the Master System classics, *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap* should be the first on your list – **Retro Gamer** readers voted it the best Master System game in issue 136. The game is a classic early example of the Metroidvania style, with our hero having lost his human form to a curse. By undergoing various animal transformations, you gain the power to overcome obstacles and access new areas of the game's sprawling platform world, fighting various dragons on the quest to become human once again. Thankfully, the price spike inspired by the 2017 remake has now passed and the game is about 20% cheaper than its 2018 peak – while complete copies often go for £18-£20, the patient can snag it for a good deal less than that.

EXPECT TO PAY £10+ (EUROPE)



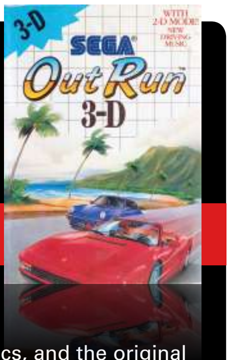
» [Master System] Lion Man can swing his sword in a long arc, letting him break blocks below.

EXPECT TO PAY £25+ (USA)

ROAD TAX

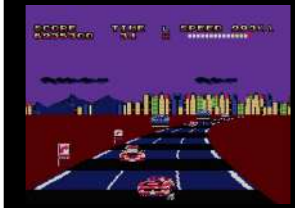
OUT RUN 3D

EXPECT TO PAY £100+ (EUROPE)

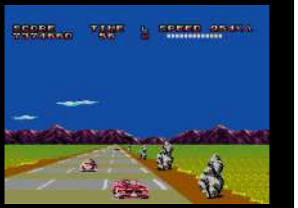


DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASE: 1989

■ One of the key selling points of the Master System was its home conversions of Sega's arcade classics, and the original *Out Run* was a hit on the console. Sega decided to have a second bite of the cherry with a version supporting the system's 3D glasses, and it's quite an interesting game as it does more than just add a new graphical mode. The game features three new musical themes alongside the classic *Magical Sound Shower*, roadside detail has been increased over the original game and there are now three difficulty modes. Despite the code supporting Japan-only peripherals such as the FM sound unit and paddle controller, *Out Run 3D* was released only in Europe and Brazil. It's one of the better 3D games for the console, and the brand recognition ensures that the price remains high – £100 is your starting point for a complete European copy, and a Brazilian copy in good condition will fetch the same.



» [Master System] This night time stage is a new addition for *Out Run 3D*, and looks quite nice.



» [Master System] The muddy strips by the road weren't possible in the original Master System *Out Run*.

THE SEGA 3D GLASSES

If you can splash the cash, this accessory is essential

Available separately or as part of the Sega Super System bundle, Sega's 3D glasses allow for stereoscopic display in supported games. These are active 3D glasses, which work by rapidly obscuring your vision with LCD shutters. Your TV will display an image that rapidly flickers between frames intended for your left eye and your right eye, with the glasses synchronised to the console's refresh rate so that each eye only sees the correct frames. This provides a convincing illusion of depth, though it does mean that each of your eyes only sees 30 frames per second (or 25, on a PAL console). These days they're not easy to use, as they don't work with the Master System II because they require the original model's card slot, and they also don't work with modern LCD TV sets. They're not cheap either – if you fancy picking them up, you can expect a boxed unit to set you back £150 or more.

COLLECTING TIPS!

Go Euro

■ With no regional lockout between US and European Master System hardware, there's no disadvantage to buying games locally.

First Place

■ The Master System II is cheap and common, but has disadvantages compared to the older model – it only outputs RF video, and doesn't have a slot for Sega Cards.

Variant Strain

■ Variant releases can be quite highly prized – watch out for the 'paper bag' *Classics* range, Kixx budget games and the Australian double pack releases in particular.

Plan For Japan

■ Apart from being physically incompatible, some early Japanese games are also software incompatible with Western consoles. You may wish to just import hardware.

TRIPLE TROUBLE

MASTER GAMES 1

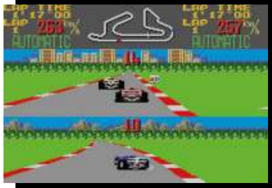
EXPECT TO PAY
£11+
(EUROPE)

DEVELOPER:	SEGA
RELEASE:	1993

■ Introduced as a counterpart to the *Mega Games* compilation cartridges that became popular on the Mega Drive, *Master Games 1* was a three game pack bundled with Master System II consoles. Unlike the Mega Games series, the first Master Games cartridge was also the last and it's one of very few compilations available on the system. The package consists of *Super Monaco GP, Columns* and *World Soccer*, with no menu available – instead, a different game is started each time the console is switched on. If you pick this one up, which you might well choose to do as a quick way to bolster your collection, it's worth knowing that there's no dedicated manual. Instead, Sega packed in individual manuals for each of the collection's games.

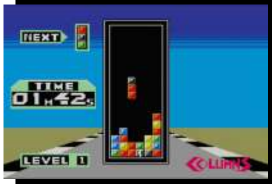
WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

The three games that comprise this compilation



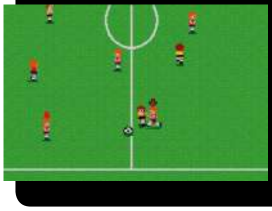
Super Monaco GP

Despite sharing its name with the impressive arcade game, this Master System racer has little else in common with it, playing from a third-person perspective and dropping the need to reach a certain position. The inclusion of split-screen play is good, but cornering is rather tough – it's extremely hard not to spin out frequently.



Columns

The Master System version of this classic puzzler is one of the better ones out there – as well as the classic endless mode, it has a good versus game and a Flash mode, which takes after the arcade game *Flash Point*. This is the star of the compilation, and it may even be best to think of it as '*Columns* with some bonus games'.



World Soccer

Playing this slow, stodgy football game, you'd be forgiven for thinking it stars Sunday league teams rather than the eight international sides represented. The screen doesn't even scroll, instead moving in sectors when you reach the edge of the screen. It has a little novelty value, but won't satisfy any serious football fans.

ALL THAT GLITTERS...

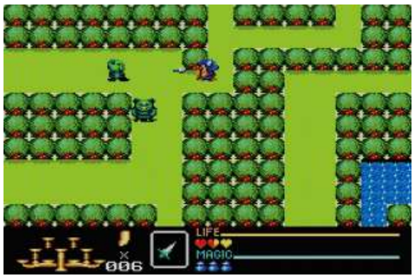
GOLDEN AXE WARRIOR

EXPECT TO PAY
£180+
(USA)

EXPECT TO PAY
£80+
(EUROPE)

DEVELOPER:	SEGA
RELEASE:	1991

■ It's fair to say that Sega probably had one eye on *The Legend Of Zelda* when developing this particular *Golden Axe* spin-off – the exploration and combat are very heavily inspired by Nintendo's classic, to say the least. There's a bit more dialogue and it looks quite a bit nicer, but ultimately it doesn't have the same level of overall quality as the game that NES owners enjoyed. Like *Phantasy Star*, the battery-backed save system made this an expensive cart to manufacture and sell, which would likely have constrained sales. The game isn't exactly cheap in Europe as we've seen it sell from £80-£155 (though we've also seen a loose cart go for under £25), but it's particularly expensive in North America due to being released during the system's terminal decline, and can fetch up to £240 there.

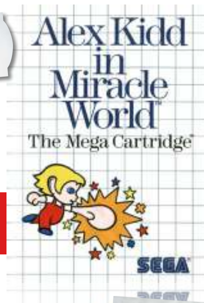


» [Master System] Combat can be quite tricky even in the early stages of the game, as your health is very limited.

SUCKER PUNCH

ALEX KIDD IN MIRACLE WORLD

EXPECT TO PAY
£32+
(EUROPE)

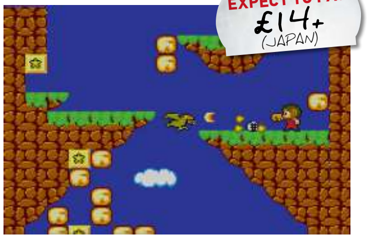


EXPECT TO PAY
£23+
(USA)

EXPECT TO PAY
£14+
(JAPAN)

DEVELOPER:	SEGA
RELEASE:	1986

■ Alex Kidd's debut adventure is a bread-and-butter Master System experience. The platform-hopping action is certainly of a high quality, but Sega really broke the mould with the inclusion of a variety of vehicles and boss fights based on rock-paper-scissors. Add a memorable soundtrack and some fun secrets, and it's easy to understand why it's one of the system's best and most iconic games. Given the popularity of the game amongst fans of the console, you'd expect *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* to be cheap – and you'd be wrong. Though millions of copies were built into Master System consoles, the cartridge version is actually not particularly common. While we've seen a complete copy go as low as £32, it's worth noting that most complete copies sell for £50-£85, so you may wish to skip the hassle and seek a console with the game already built in.



» [Master System] Many elements of the game were inspired by *Dragon Ball*, including the opening stage.

MORE GAMES TO CONSIDER

ASTERIX

DEVELOPER:	SEGA
RELEASED:	1991

EXPECT TO PAY

£3+ (EUROPE)

BUGGY RUN

DEVELOPER:	SIMS
RELEASED:	1993

EXPECT TO PAY

£250+ (EUROPE)

CHOPLIFTER

DEVELOPER:	SEGA
RELEASED:	1986

EXPECT TO PAY

£7+ (EUROPE), **£5+** (USA)

FANTASY ZONE

DEVELOPER:	SEGA
RELEASED:	1986

EXPECT TO PAY

£10+ (EUROPE), **£25+** (USA), **£8+** (JAPAN)

MASTERS OF COMBAT

DEVELOPER:	SIMS
RELEASED:	1993

EXPECT TO PAY

£110+ (EUROPE)

PRICE SPIKES

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

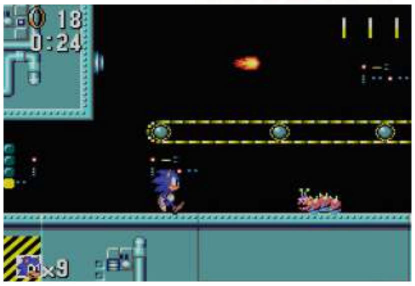
EXPECT TO PAY £5+ (EUROPE)

EXPECT TO PAY £300+ (USA)

ACTION
SEGA
Master System
SONIC
THE HEDGEHOG

DEVELOPER: ANCIENT
RELEASE: 1991

■ While *Sonic* will always be most closely associated with the Mega Drive, the Master System version is an excellent platform game that mixes original concepts with loose adaptations of Mega Drive stages. You may be surprised by the disparity in prices between regions here. In North America, *Sonic The Hedgehog* was the final game to be released for the Master System, and sold in low quantities due to the console's lack of popularity. As a cost saving measure, Sega Of America simply slapped barcode stickers on European copies of the game, and these barcode stickers are the only difference between a cheap, common copy of the game and a fantastically expensive one. You have to be a pretty hardcore collector to want to track down the North American release, but the demand is there.



» [Master System] Caterkillers are smaller on the Master System, and slightly less annoying to fight.

A STELLAR RPG

PHANTASY STAR

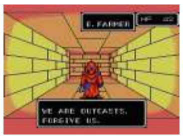
EXPECT TO PAY £70+ (EUROPE)

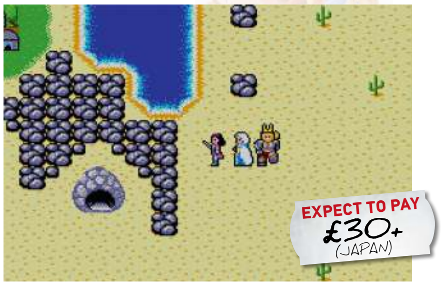
SEGA
Phantasy Star

EXPECT TO PAY £55+ (USA)

DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASE: 1987

■ The Master System's premier RPG carried a hefty £40 price tag when it launched in the UK, but for that you got a massive adventure spanning three planets, with impressively smooth 3D dungeons and battery-backed saves. Though relatively popular, the game's audience was restricted by that high initial price and as a result it sells for quite a high price today. You'll have fun no matter how you join Alis and the gang, but if you're not concerned about getting a physical version we'd recommend investigating *Sega Ages: Phantasy Star* for the Switch as an alternative. Apart from being far cheaper than a Master System copy, it rebalances gameplay and adds quality of life features that make the game more enjoyable, such as a faster walk speed and auto-mapping for dungeons.





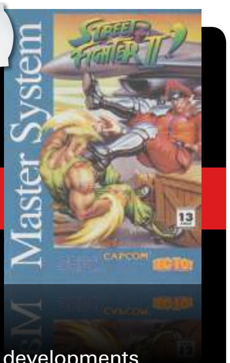
EXPECT TO PAY £30+ (JAPAN)

» [Master System] There are three planets in *Phantasy Star* – a green planet, a desert planet and an ice planet.

YOU LOSE

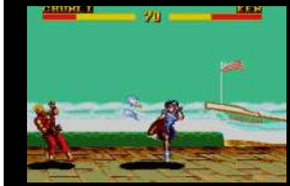
STREET FIGHTER II

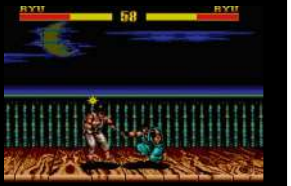
EXPECT TO PAY £250+ (BRAZIL)



DEVELOPER: TECTOY
RELEASE: 1997

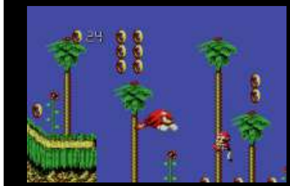
■ Brazil was a strong market for the Master System thanks to its local distributor TecToy, which went the extra mile to provide localised games and even exclusive developments for its audience. That drive to provide for its local audience led TecToy to license *Street Fighter II*, and it threw everything it had at the game, with an 8-megabit cartridge packed with speech effects. Being a big name game from an unusual region, this conversion attracts a high price, but it only possesses novelty value. The game would always have been a tall order for the Master System, but this is particularly disappointing. Character movement, collision detection and input handling are all atrocious, graphics and audio are weak, and four characters have been axed.





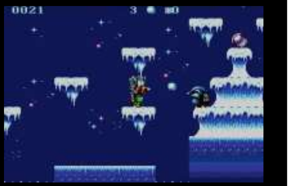
MORE FROM BRAZIL

Other TecToy exclusives that you might find interesting



Sonic Blast

One way that TecToy filled the schedules was to convert Game Gear games to the Master System, which was possible due to the two systems sharing common hardware. Unfortunately, this one isn't great – the pre-rendered visual style is way too ambitious for the Master System, and the game's poor movement would be a real problem if it had much challenge to speak of.



Fire & Ice

This Amiga conversion was originally planned for release in Europe by Virgin Interactive, only to end up being cancelled due to dwindling Master System software sales. TecToy picked up the game as it was still able to shift plenty of cartridges, and in the process rescued it from cancellation. It's a bit fiddly but it does look rather lovely.

NINJA GAIDEN

DEVELOPER: SEGA/SIMS
RELEASED: 1992
EXPECT TO PAY
£34+ (EUROPE)

R-TYPE

DEVELOPER: COMPILE
RELEASED: 1988
EXPECT TO PAY
£9+ (EUROPE), **£22+** (USA), **£45+** (JAPAN)

SHINOBI

DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASED: 1988
EXPECT TO PAY
£4+ (EUROPE), **£12+** (USA), **£8+** (JAPAN)

SONIC SPINBALL

DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASED: 1995
EXPECT TO PAY
£115+ (EUROPE)

THE NINJA

DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASED: 1986
EXPECT TO PAY
£2+ (EUROPE), **£11+** (USA), **£13+** (JAPAN)

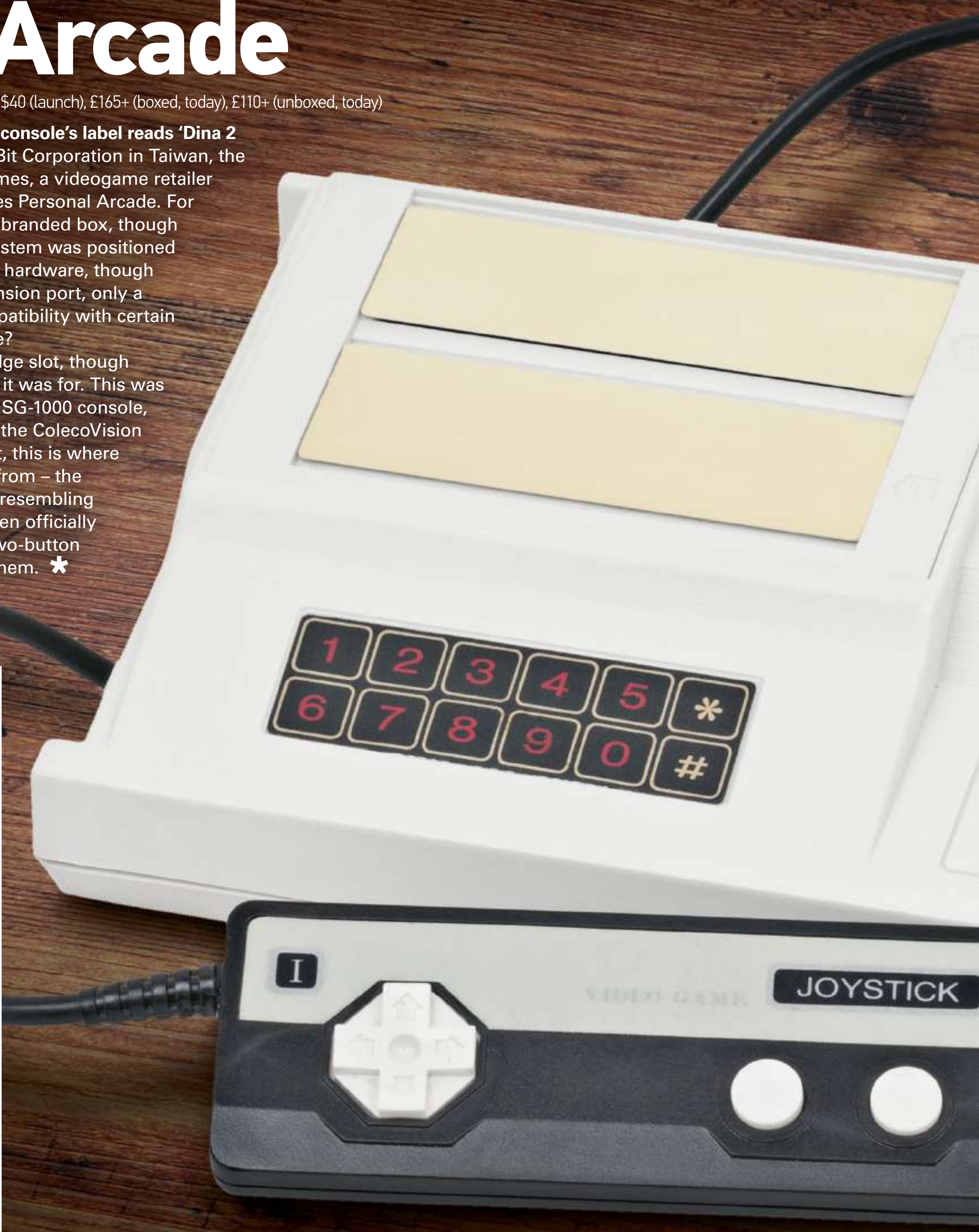
Hardware Heaven

Telegames Personal Arcade

» MANUFACTURER: Bit Corporation **» YEAR:** 1986 **» COST:** $40 (launch), £165+ (boxed, today), £110+ (unboxed, today)

No, your eyes don't deceive you – that console's label reads 'Dina 2 In One'. Originally manufactured by Bit Corporation in Taiwan, the console came to the USA via Telegames, a videogame retailer that sold the system as the Telegames Personal Arcade. For early production runs, this extended to just a branded box, though later models replaced the Dina sticker. The system was positioned as a cheap alternative to official ColecoVision hardware, though it did have some major drawbacks – no expansion port, only a single number pad for player one, and incompatibility with certain controllers. But for just $40, who would argue?

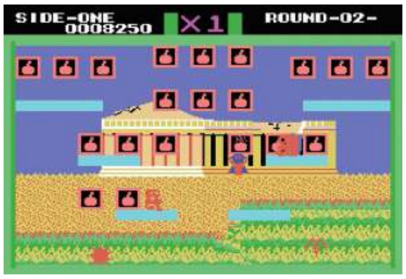
Of course, the console has a second cartridge slot, though American players wouldn't have known what it was for. This was in fact designed to support games for Sega's SG-1000 console, as it shared the majority of its hardware with the ColecoVision and achieving compatibility was trivial. In fact, this is where most of the design cues seem to have come from – the Telegames Personal Arcade has a wide body resembling the SG-1000 Mark II, which had previously been officially released in Taiwan by Aaronix, with similar two-button joypads and side-mounted storage bays for them. *

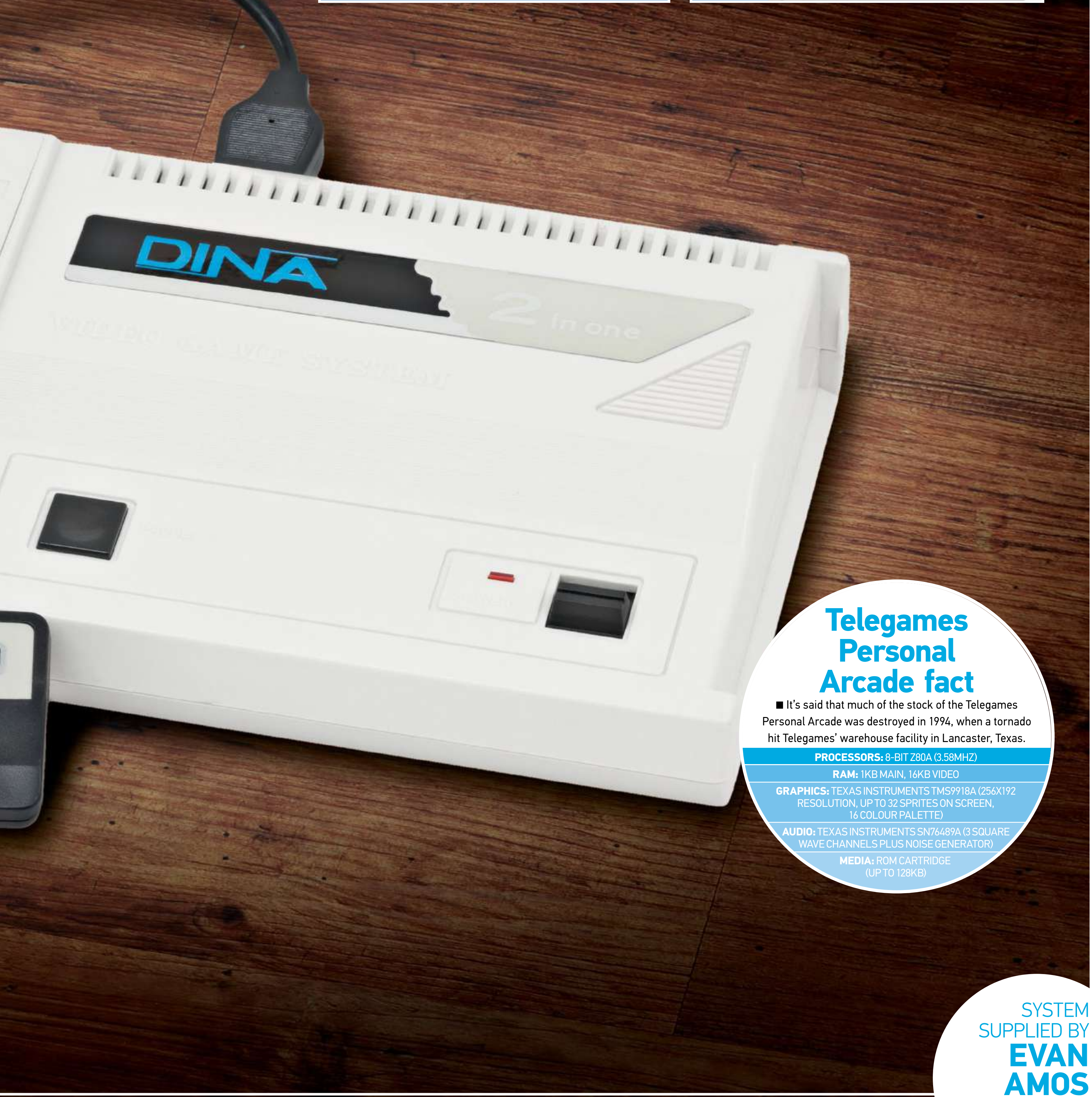


ESSENTIAL GAME

Bomb Jack

The ColecoVision was no slouch when it came to arcade conversions, but could the SG-1000 library fill any gaps? Indeed it could, as the ColecoVision never received an official conversion of Tecmo's excellent *Bomb Jack*. Sega did license the game, and produced its own version for the SG-1000 internally. The results were pretty good – the game plays rather faithfully considering the limitations of the hardware. While the d-pad is known to be pretty stiff on the Telegames Personal Arcade controllers – they are, after all, cheap clone console controllers – when compared to the original ColecoVision controllers they seem like a considerably better way to play the game.





Telegames Personal Arcade fact

■ It's said that much of the stock of the Telegames Personal Arcade was destroyed in 1994, when a tornado hit Telegames' warehouse facility in Lancaster, Texas.

PROCESSORS: 8-BIT Z80A (3.58MHZ)

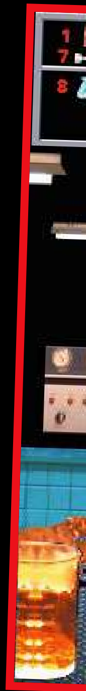
RAM: 1KB MAIN, 16KB VIDEO

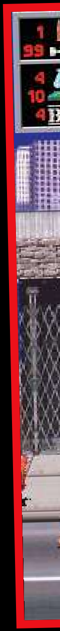
GRAPHICS: TEXAS INSTRUMENTS TMS9918A (256X192 RESOLUTION, UP TO 32 SPRITES ON SCREEN, 16 COLOUR PALETTE)

AUDIO: TEXAS INSTRUMENTS SN76489A (3 SQUARE WAVE CHANNELS PLUS NOISE GENERATOR)

MEDIA: ROM CARTRIDGE (UP TO 128KB)

SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**





THE MAKING OF NARC

THE EIGHTIES – A TIME OF THE BUDDY ACTION MOVIE, VIOLENCE ON THE STREETS AND A GRIM WAR ON DRUGS. ENTER NARC, THE VIDEOGAME THAT COMBINES ALL THREE OF THESE ELEMENTS INTO ONE GLEEFULLY RELENTLESS AND BRUTAL ARCADE EXPERIENCE

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** WILLIAMS ELECTRONIC GAMES/WMS INDUSTRIES
- **DEVELOPER:** WILLIAMS ELECTRONIC GAMES
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

For the American videogame market in particular, the Eighties was a turbulent time. Having already fashioned a notable career thanks to the legendary arcade games *Defender* and *Robotron: 2048*, Eugene Jarvis was right in the thick of it. "There was a massive decline in player interest in video arcade games due to the rise of PCs and quality home consoles such as the Nintendo Entertainment System," the veteran videogame designer tells us.

"A simultaneous flood of inexpensive Japanese JAMMA conversion kit games devastated any remaining market for new American arcade games – this killed off Williams' development efforts." Focusing on a return to its roots – pinball – Williams survived until Eugene returned to the company in the winter of 1986 with a new idea, "I proposed a reboot of Williams' videogames using a new ultra powerful hi-resolution hardware system," he says. This system, centred on a graphics-orientated Texas Instruments chip, the TMS34010, allowed for 256 colours, a 512 x 400 resolution and – in its most obvious trait – photorealistic digitised graphics. Williams, having scored a massive hit with the pinball table *High Speed*, was once more cash-rich and keen to re-enter the videogames market. "The timing was perfect," continues Eugene, "as the two-year project timeline would introduce the game in 1988, enough time for a rebound after the detritus of the arcade crash had settled."

With Eugene settling in as project director and coder, the team chiefly comprised of lead artist Jack Haeger, supported by John Newcomer, and George Petro and Mark Loffredo handling coding and hardware duties respectively. All were to be part of something that used its technological advancements to present a game of extraordinary violence and destruction, its origins stretching all the way back to the Sixties. "The whole drug thing started off then with flower children and hippies getting stoned on a little weed," notes Eugene. From this point, through the Seventies and into the Eighties, the range of substances ballooned – as did the human toll. "America wanted to somehow stop this tide of drug mayhem and human destruction, and thus was formed The War On Drugs." In fact the campaign had begun in 1971, although it was FBI director William Sessions who connected the world of arcade games to create another public service campaign, Winners Don't Use Drugs, in the late Eighties. In typical Eugene Jarvis fashion, the message was twisted to the max for his latest game. "Our lead artist created our own campaign with the classic *Narc* twist 'Say no or DIE!', and the familiar police slogan

EUGENE JARVIS

The veteran games developer has made a string of arcade hits.

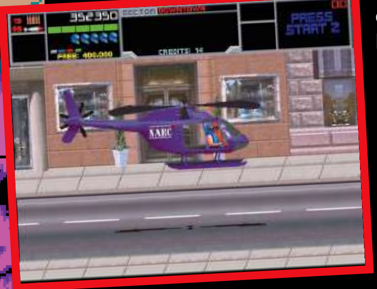
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DEFENDER
SYSTEM: ARCADE, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1981

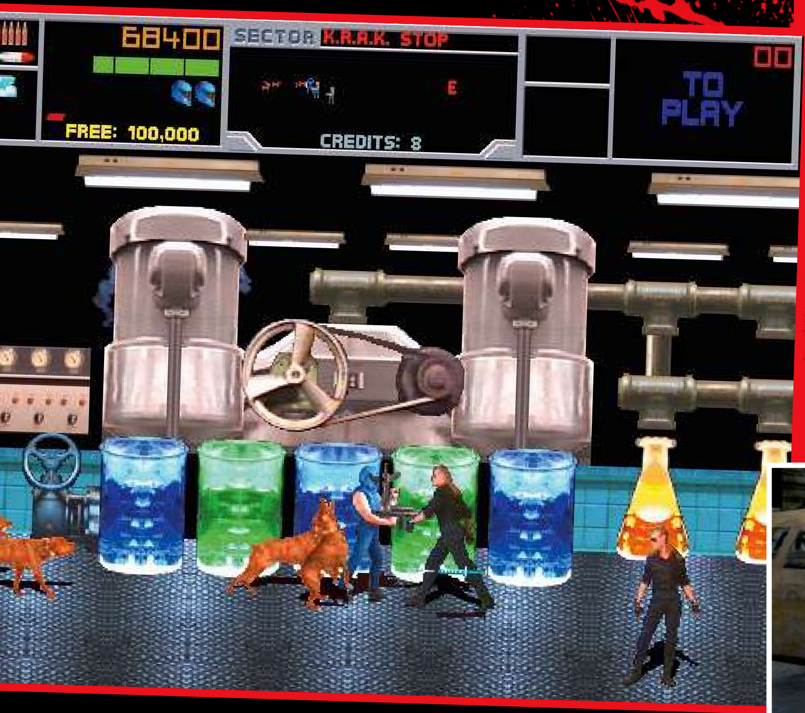
ROBOTRON: 2084
SYSTEM: ARCADE, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1982

SMASH TV (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1990

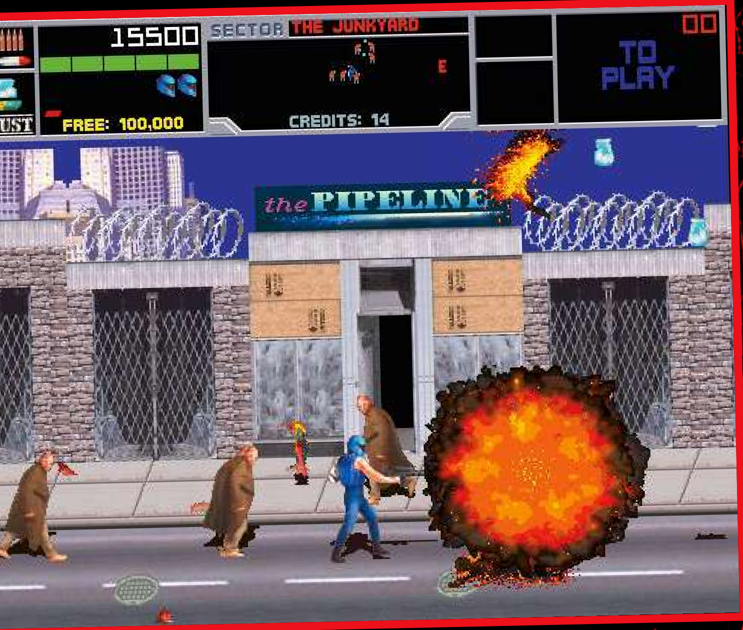
» [Arcade] The chopper drops its agents into the streets.



> **"America wanted to somehow stop this tide of drug mayhem and human destruction, and thus was formed 'The War On Drugs'"**
> **EUGENE JARVIS**



» [Arcade] Fending off attack dogs and evil scientists in the chemical labs.



» [Arcade] You have the right to remain silent… forever!

'To Protect And Serve' morphed into 'Protect The Innocent and Punish the Guilty'. We wanted a bad-ass justice feeling to the whole thing."
Having first worked at Williams in the summer of 1983, initially in its service department, George Petro used the rich collection of gaming experts to gain experience while studying at college. "During Christmas of 1986, my senior year, Ken Fedesna [Williams' general manager] offered me a post-college job as a programmer on a soon-to-be-starting Eugene Jarvis videogame project. Who could turn down that offer?!"

In *Narc*, one or two players controls Max Force or Hit Man, the appropriately named agents of an anti-narcotics branch of the police force. Their mission is to destroy the gangs distributing the drugs, the network supporting them and finally, the man behind it all, Mr Big. From a dingy junkyard to the seedy streets, dark underground levels and Mr Big's corporate-style headquarters, the two agents are accosted ▶

VIOLENCE IS GOLDEN

GAMES THAT ANGERED THE WORLD

MANHUNT

Taking place in a corrupt city not dissimilar to *Narc*'s urban nightmare, *Manhunt* is a forbidding and violent survival horror that sees the player assume the role of a death row prisoner forced to take part in a sadistic game of cat and mouse. Developed by Rockstar North, a predictable – and sales-boosting – furore erupted upon its release in 2003.

GRAND THEFT AUTO

It might be hard to imagine today, but even the top-down original of this famous series attracted its fair share of notoriety. The reason was plain. No longer is the player on a mission to rescue hostages or save the Earth from aliens – now they can indiscriminately murder and steal to their heart's content, something the game cheerfully encourages.

POSTAL

Taken from the saying 'going postal', attributed to any *Falling Down*-style mass-murder spree, *Postal*'s macabre gameplay contributes chiefly to its infamous reputation. In order to progress through each level, a certain amount of opponents must be killed and there is plenty of deadly weaponry and masses of blood throughout.

RAYDEN
SONYA
99

MORTAL KOMBAT

Utilising a similar display to *Narc*, Midway's one-on-one beat-'em-up was designed to cause controversy. The realistic display caused the most concern as each character rips, punches and kicks their way through the game, gushes of blood peppering the screen. The end result of the uproar was the creation of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) in America.

0:14
BLUE
HALL 1
Possible 2
Captured 0

NIGHT TRAP

While nowhere near as bloodily violent as the other games on this list, *Night Trap*, along with *Mortal Kombat*, was one of the examples used at the Senate hearing that resulted in the ESRB. An early interactive movie, it was the game's realism that worried politicians and parents, and conversely thrilled gamers and teenagers.

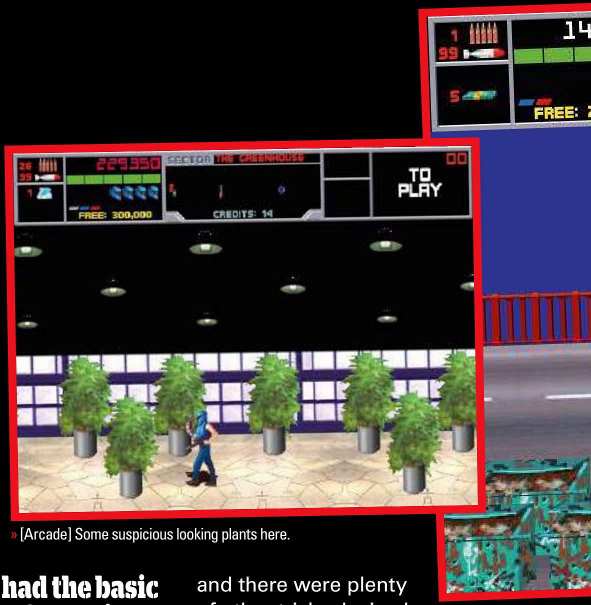
XBOX
NARC
18
MIDWAY

REBOOTING NARC

HOW MIDWAY'S UPDATE FAILED TO IMPRESS

Released in 2005, this modern update of the arcade game *Narc* manages to be even more controversial in an age of *Grand Theft Auto* and *Call Of Duty* levels of violence. Why? Because the lines between order and chaos are even more blurred, with the player able to use the drugs they confiscate, or even sell it themselves, a vast divergence from the original's anti-drug theme. Based around a fictitious substance called Liquid Soul, the 2005 version of *Narc* also included much of the original's extreme violence in a third-person environment that evinced the 1988 game's murky underworld feel. The stark option to play either a good or bad cop is the game's USP, along with some notable voice artists, including Michael Madsen, Michael Wincott and Ron Perlman. Released on the Xbox, PS2 and PC, it featured an excellent soundtrack (Curtis Mayfield and Cypress Hill, among others), but its use of a relatively ancient game engine failed to endear *Narc* to a wider audience, and would appear to have marked the end of this pugnacious and discordant series. It didn't impress the original's designer either. "That was the game where the *Narc* guys went over to the dark side," says Eugene. "It turned the whole thing upside down, and totally ruined the story and righteousness of the game. It died a well-deserved death!"

relentlessly by perps, pushers and crazed psychos. While they possess powerful bullet-spewing machine guns, actually arresting a perp accrues more points. It's not as much fun though. "Eugene had the basic concept of cleaning up the streets," says George, "but past that we made it up as we went along. It's definitely more dangerous to go in for the arrest, but if you really want to get a high score, you need to do it." Unsurprisingly, given the photorealistic display, cinema was an influence as Eugene recalls, "*RoboCop* was a huge influence, as well as *Dirty Harry*, the *Death Wish* series and Michael Mann's *Thief*. As the guy who cut his teeth on *Defender* and *Robotron: 2084*, blowing shit up was definitely part of the plan!"



» [Arcade] Some suspicious looking plants here.

> "Eugene had the basic concept of cleaning up the streets, but past that we made it up as we went along"
> **GEORGE PETRO**

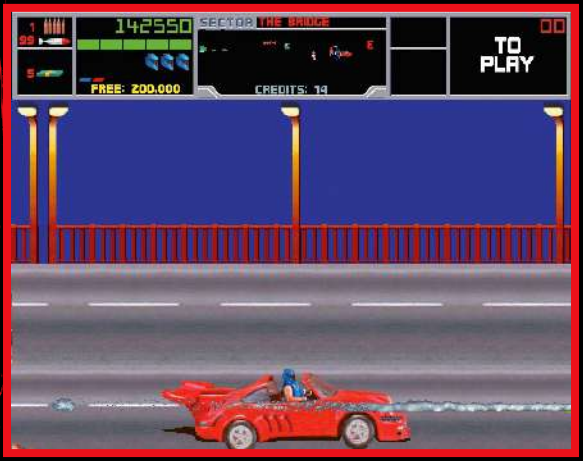
The two-year plan proved accurate. Working with the new technology first, Eugene and his team gauged what the new chip could actually achieve before devising the game that would utilise these new benefits. "We had to fully develop the digitisation in-house," remembers George. "We used a new capture card by AT&T called the Targa and interestingly this was the first system to output the TGA format, which is where the name comes from." The board captured one frame of live action at a time, complete with a chunk of background noise. But with the card's in-built software "a disaster" according to George, he and his colleagues had to write their own capture and art tool software. "Please keep in mind that this was at a time when the IBM PC was in its early stages and had no GUI – it was all text. It was a ground up creation of both hardware and software like nothing I had ever worked on before."

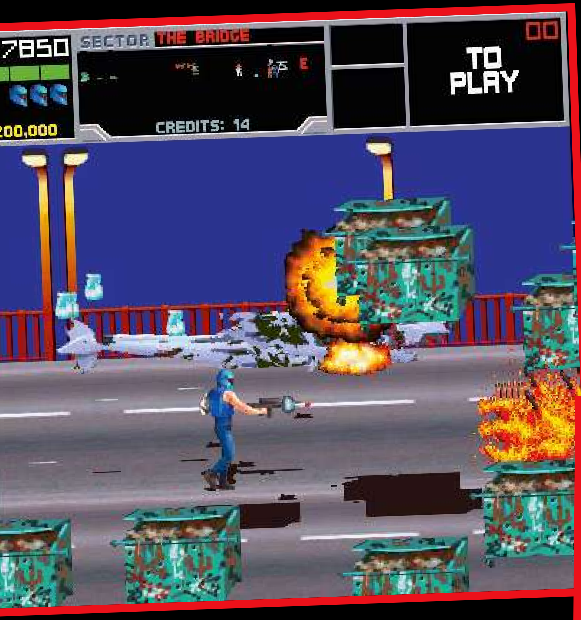
For Eugene Jarvis, overseeing the now-vital photo shoots was an important role as project director. "We would run the actors through costume and make up and then shoot them with a colour video camera against a green, blue or grey screen, depending on the colours needed," he explains. "We would try and shoot them as big as we could make them in the frame in order to maximise resolution, and it was important to get good contrasts and great concise movement that could be looped." For the walking and running motions, the team used actors on treadmills to achieve consistent cycles, and there were plenty of other tricks devised to help improve the standard of display. "We found we could get great detail using baggy, loose-fitting clothes, or grant more definition to characters by rubbing white flour in the front of their jeans. We even put oil on leathers to get more sheen for the camera," Eugene tells us. Yet undoubtedly the craziest aspect of the shoot was when two trained attack pit bulls were brought into the studio. "We got some incredible footage of the dogs attacking the trainer's heavily padded arm," remembers Eugene. "The trainer was careful to only let one dog out of its cage at a time – it was amazing how frenzied the caged dog would become when the other dog attacked. Then somehow one of the dogs got loose and wandered toward us behind the camera. We all but pissed our pants, but fortunately the trainer was able to lure the dog back before we became lunch."

The result of these sessions was some amazing graphics, often intertwined with macabre and sleazy imagery such as the disconcerting clown Kinky Pinky, a character created in the mind of art lead Jack Haeger. "[Jack] was obsessed with the carny scene with a noir twist," reveals Eugene, "and at the time there was an active mass murderer in Chicago who posed as a clown to gain confidence with his victims. Kinky Pinky really captured the twisted nature of these psycho killers and their sexually perverted psychoses." On the flip side, the two heroes stride around the game, dispensing hot-lead justice to any who cross their path. Clad in blue and red motorcycle helmets, these faceless warriors represent a put-upon populace which has had enough of the city's squalid drug-infused crime wave.

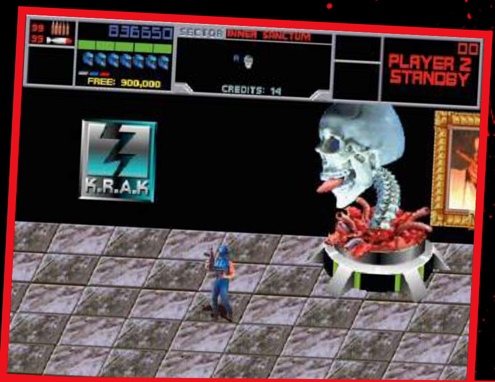
Originally, the player characters were significantly diverse, holding their weapons differently and one taller than the other. "It made the gameplay very inconsistent between player positions," notes George. "Also, the full-motion digitised graphics took up an incredible amount of memory, and having two distinct characters greatly diminished our ability to have other unique features in the game." The result was a memory-saving palette swap and the round motorcycle helmets to anonymise the characters.

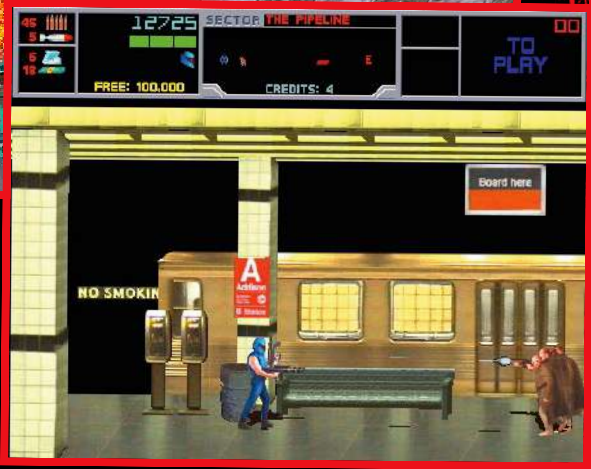
» [Arcade] Perps can be run over in the sports car.





» [Arcade] Deadly dumpsters on the bridge.





» [Arcade] Catching a train has never been so hazardous.

Along with many of its arcade-inhabiting peers, *Narc* was designed and balanced to extract the maximum amount of cash from eager gamers. "The game used the popular buy-in mechanic," explains Eugene. "Rather than ending the game upon exhaustion of lives, the player adds more coins for more lives. So we were very creative in finding ways to kill the player off." When you list these methods, it reinforces the ethos behind *Narc*: bullets, syringes, falling dumpsters, RPGs, bombs and more are just some of the hazards awaiting these brave agents. "We were still in the time when games would punish the player," smiles George. "I think *Narc* was the epitome of player punishment – so in that sense, we balanced the game, but for maximum player abuse!" The pinnacle of this cruelty is the game's final boss, Mr Big, a precursor to *Smash TV*'s Mutoid Man. "The whole idea was figuring out how to prolong the battle so that the player always thinks they are almost at the point of victory," grins Eugene. "So, we used the concept of the Russian doll, where multiple bosses exist within the giant head, revealing the next level when beaten!" Additionally, different tactics are required for each segment, making the fight a new learning experience each time – and therefore earning more money for arcade owners. And even if you succeed beyond all the odds and defeat the many incarnations of Mr Big, there is one final twist as the game announces the conclusion of a strenuous and hazardous training mission. "That was a kind of crazy joke that we came up with," admits Eugene. "You never want to say 'The End' – there always has to be a new challenge!"

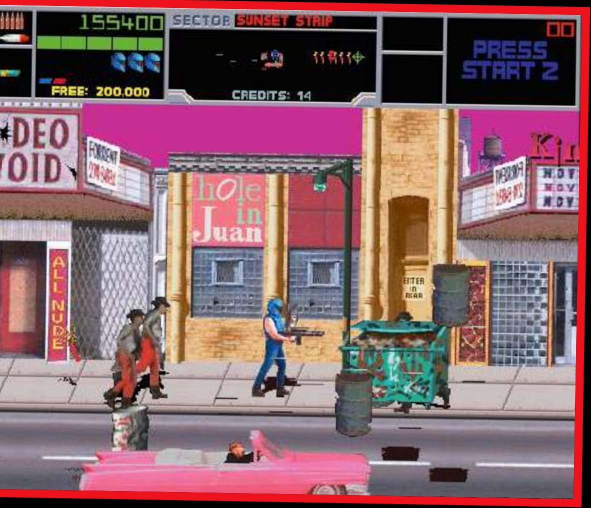
> **"Kinky Pinkey really captured the twisted nature of these psycho killers and their sexually perverted psychoses"**
> **EUGENE JARVIS**

Due to its high cost and ultra-violence, distribution of *Narc* was never stratospheric, although Eugene estimates around 3,750 cabinets were circulated to arcades around the globe. And as the game's designer observes, it represents a significant step between the pixelated videogames of the Seventies and Eighties and the highly cinematic experiences we enjoy today. "*Narc* really showed the awesomeness of capturing real live human actors and all their nuances, expressions and character, which enhanced the gameplay and story."

Together with the adult themes – drugs, prostitutes and extreme violence – it's an unusual mix bolted onto the familiar run-and-gun gameplay. "But the cool thing was that we played it straight, so if you asked if *Narc* was satire or propaganda, you could take it either way, and really it's both and neither at the same time."

For George Petro, his once-in-a-lifetime chance instigated a partnership with Eugene that continues today. "I think he liked throwing me in the deep end and seeing if I could swim, and it was the most challenging project of my life. But really you have to credit Jack Haeger – just because us programmers came up with a way to digitise the graphics, it didn't automatically mean they would be good. It was Jack, a truly gifted artist who happened to use his gifts in the videogame industry, who turned the game into art." Thanks to *Narc* and its acquisition of Midway in 1988, videogames were once more on the board for Williams, and beginning the change into a modern and more mature era. *

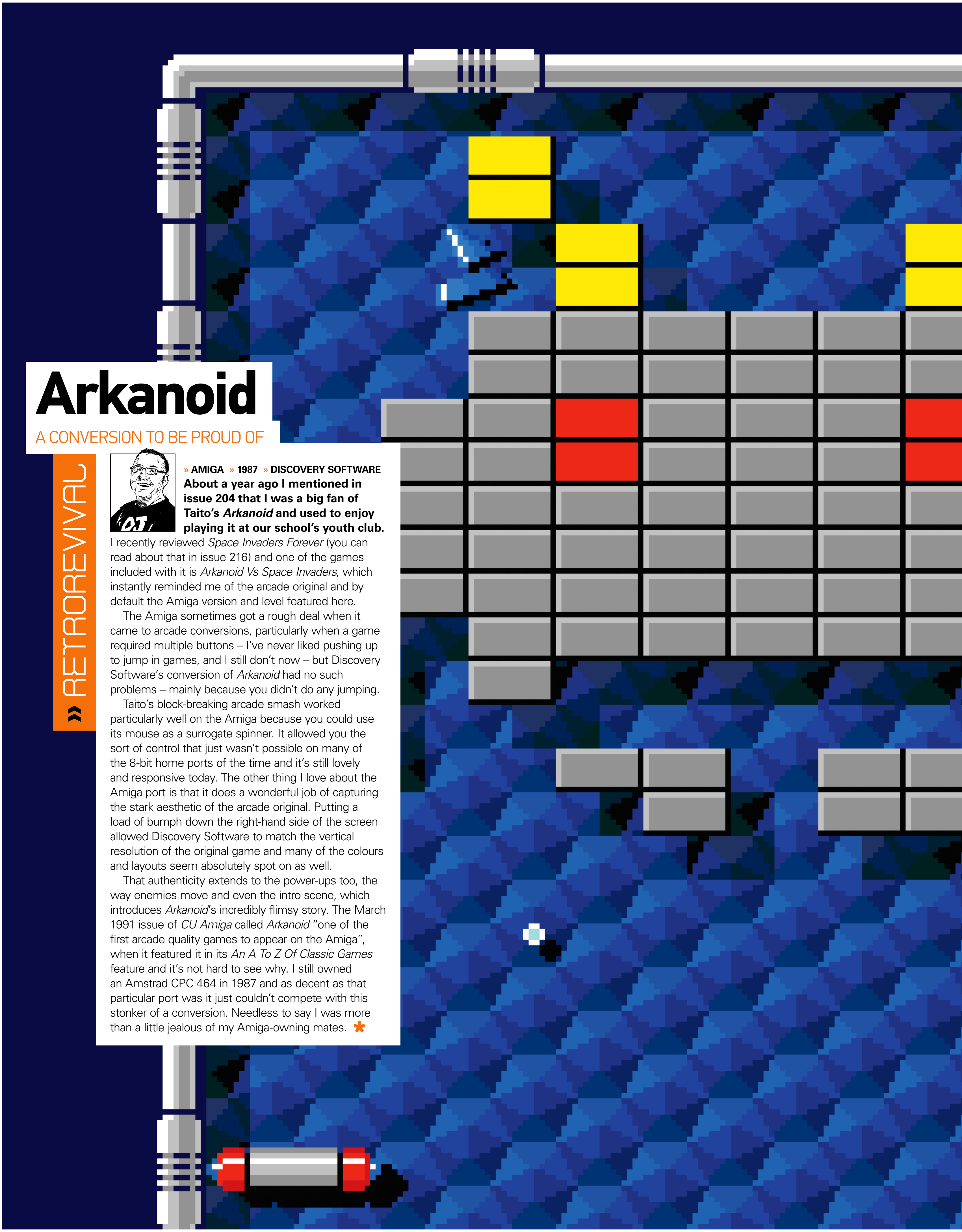
» [Arcade] Exploring the sleazy underworld of *Narc*.



KNOWING NARC

THE NARC TRIVIA FILE

- ***Narc* was the first arcade game to use the new Texas Instruments 34010 processor chip.**
- **The trench coat-wearing Das Lof gangster was actually modelled on hardware designer Mark Loffredo.**
- **George Petro still owns an impressive *Narc* memorabilia collection, including the original marquee and control panel art.**
- **Having lost co-workers, family and friends to drugs, the theme of *Narc* was a deeply personal one for Eugene Jarvis.**
- **The architect of the rather disturbing psycho clown Kinky Pinky, Jack Haeger, went on to create the infamous Nineties Midway game *CarnEvil*. Coulrophobics should steer clear… trust us.**
- **The tech behind *Narc* was later used for the arcade games *Smash TV, Mortal Kombat, Terminator 2* and *NBA Jam*.**
- **According to Eugene, a Williams board member decried *Narc* as a "surrealistic nightmare" and attempted to have development halted. "I considered it a great compliment!" laughs Eugene.**
- **The clown serial killer that influenced Kinky Pinky was John Wayne Gacy.**
- **The unveiling of *Narc* at the Sheraton Hotel in Chicago was a dramatic affair complete with professional stuntmen storming the ballroom and staging a mock battle with submachine guns. Unsurprisingly, the distributors, sales and marketing people in attendance all dove for cover and took a while to venture back out.**



Arkanoid

A CONVERSION TO BE PROUD OF

» AMIGA » 1987 » DISCOVERY SOFTWARE

About a year ago I mentioned in issue 204 that I was a big fan of Taito's *Arkanoid* and used to enjoy playing it at our school's youth club. I recently reviewed *Space Invaders Forever* (you can read about that in issue 216) and one of the games included with it is *Arkanoid Vs Space Invaders*, which instantly reminded me of the arcade original and by default the Amiga version and level featured here.

The Amiga sometimes got a rough deal when it came to arcade conversions, particularly when a game required multiple buttons – I've never liked pushing up to jump in games, and I still don't now – but Discovery Software's conversion of *Arkanoid* had no such problems – mainly because you didn't do any jumping.

Taito's block-breaking arcade smash worked particularly well on the Amiga because you could use its mouse as a surrogate spinner. It allowed you the sort of control that just wasn't possible on many of the 8-bit home ports of the time and it's still lovely and responsive today. The other thing I love about the Amiga port is that it does a wonderful job of capturing the stark aesthetic of the arcade original. Putting a load of bumph down the right-hand side of the screen allowed Discovery Software to match the vertical resolution of the original game and many of the colours and layouts seem absolutely spot on as well.

That authenticity extends to the power-ups too, the way enemies move and even the intro scene, which introduces *Arkanoid*'s incredibly flimsy story. The March 1991 issue of *CU Amiga* called *Arkanoid* "one of the first arcade quality games to appear on the Amiga", when it featured it in its *An A To Z Of Classic Games* feature and it's not hard to see why. I still owned an Amstrad CPC 464 in 1987 and as decent as that particular port was it just couldn't compete with this stonker of a conversion. Needless to say I was more than a little jealous of my Amiga-owning mates. *

ARKANOID

500

HIGH SCORE
50000

DISCOVERY
SOFTWARE
INTERNATIONAL

TAITO

ULTIMATE GUIDE

GOLDEN AXE The Revenge of DEATH ADDER™

YOU WAIT ALMOST 30 YEARS FOR A HOME CONVERSION OF GOLDEN AXE: THE REVENGE OF DEATH ADDER TO COME ALONG, AND THEN TWO ARRIVE AT THE SAME TIME. WE CELEBRATE BY JUMPING ON A FIRE-BREATHING MANTIS AND BURNING SOME BAD SORTS

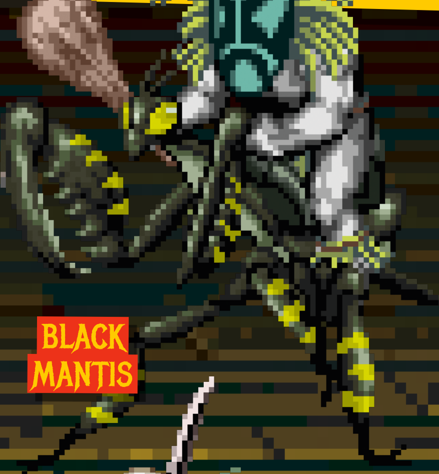
WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

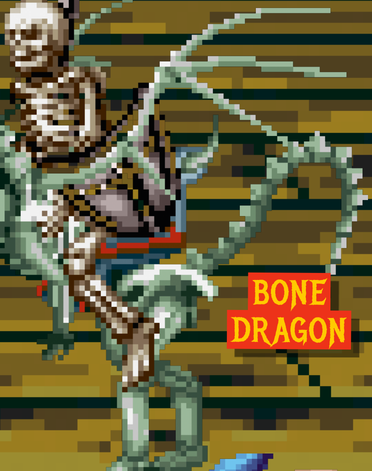
Sega's sequel to its smash hit brawler *Golden Axe* barged into arcades in September 1992, running on the powerful System 32 hardware that was to be the final iteration of the famous Super Scaler series. Conversions were anticipated – it was a step beyond the 32X add-on, but the Saturn would have surely handled it – yet no home version appeared.

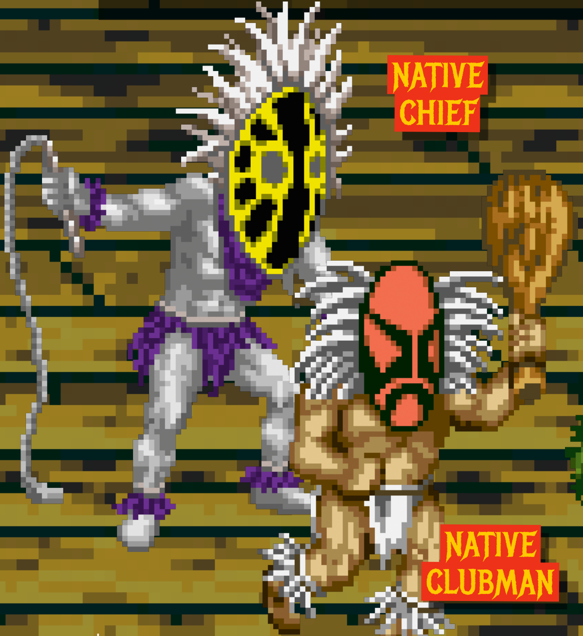
That finally changed last year, first with the release of Arcade1UP's replica cab, which was headlined by *Golden Axe: The Revenge Of Death Adder* (*RODA*) and also featured the original *Golden Axe* plus *Altered Beast*, *Shinobi* and *Wrestle War*. Then in December, Sega's Astro City Mini launched in Japan (you can read a review of the system on page 100) and included *RODA* in its impressive 37 game roster, alongside three other System 32 games: *Rad Mobile*, *Dark Edge* and *Arabian Fight*. This tiny device deserves huge praise for finally showcasing these titles as the System 32 could be called Sega's 'lost' generation. In the early Nineties it was quickly overshadowed by Sega's own Model 1 system and the emergence of true, polygonal 3D titles like *Virtua Racing* and *Virtua Fighter*. And it has remained in the dark due to the lack of faithful home conversions (and yes, that includes *Gale Racer*, the pared back Saturn port of *Rad Mobile*).

Of all of the unconverted System 32 games, *RODA* is probably the most disappointing – and baffling. This was, after all, the sequel to one of Sega's most successful, universally loved games that was a hit in the arcades and at home. The popular Mega Drive conversion received its own follow-up, *Golden Axe II*, in 1991, but this was a quick rehash rather than a brand-new quest. For *RODA*, original designer Makoto Uchida returned with the clear objective of ramping everything up to borderline ridiculous levels. And the result was one of the best beat-'em-ups of the Nineties.

The game featured a roster of four new adventurers (only Gilius Thunderhead returned, albeit as a sidekick riding on Goah the giant's shoulders), and all four could be played simultaneously. Each character was now blessed with extra attacks, including special moves and a hidden finisher (dash, jump, then pull down and attack a felled enemy, in case you were wondering). In

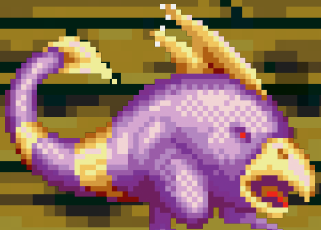

BLACK MANTIS


BONE DRAGON

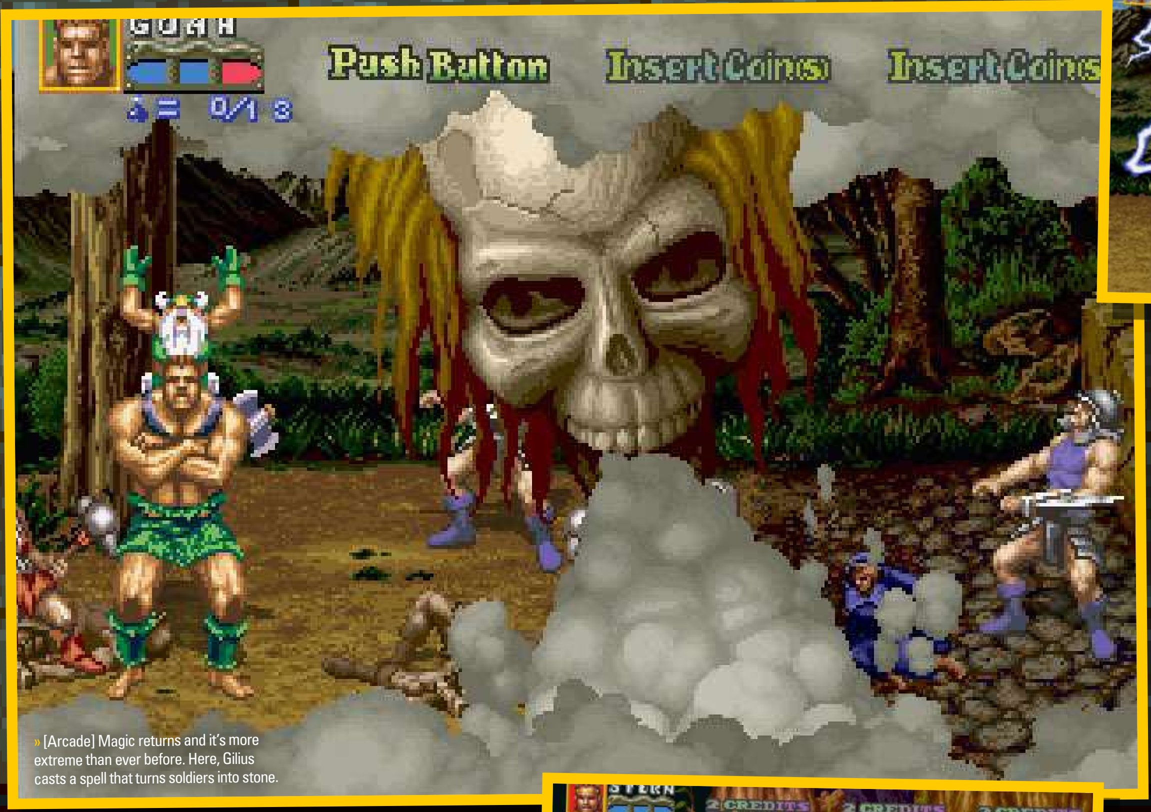

NATIVE CHIEF

NATIVE CLUBMAN

MAGIC TREE


CHICKENLEG

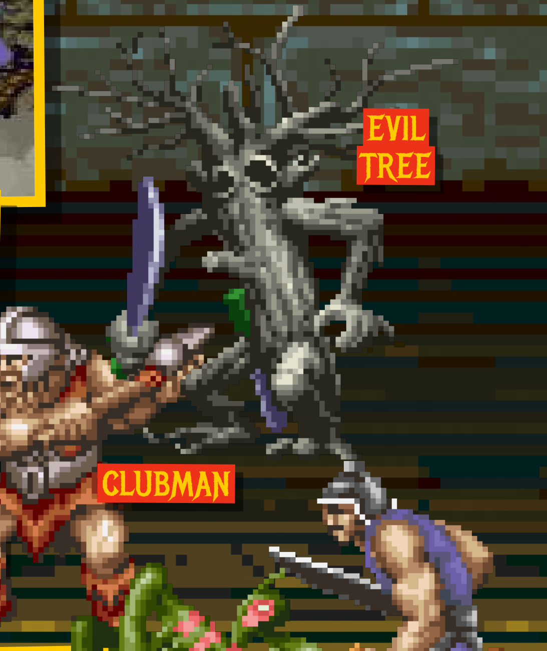
BLUE THIEF


GOAH
Push Button
Insert Coins
Insert Coins

» [Arcade] Magic returns and it's more extreme than ever before. Here, Gilius casts a spell that turns soldiers into stone.

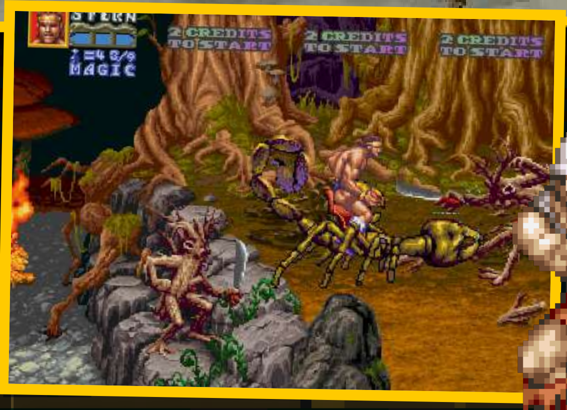
DORA
MAGIC
Push Button
Insert Coins
Insert Coins

> "Original designer Makoto Uchida returned with the clear objective of ramping everything up to borderline ridiculous levels"

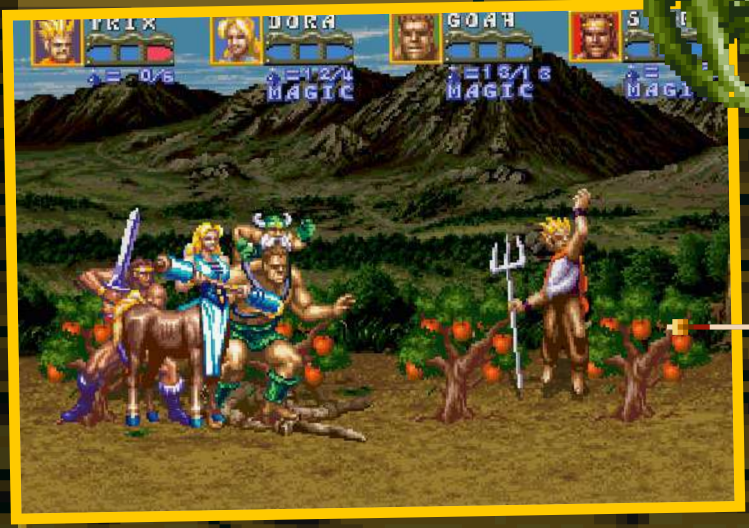

EVIL TREE
CLUBMAN

multiplayer you could also team up with other characters to perform a powerful tag-team finisher. Rideable creatures returned, and they too had new moves, plus the ability to carry weapons. So you could be playing as Goah, riding on a giant stinging scorpion while catapulting flaming rocks, as Gilius casts petrifying magic. Throw in three other players and an army of enemies to hack through, and you'll appreciate how brilliantly over-the-top the game could be.

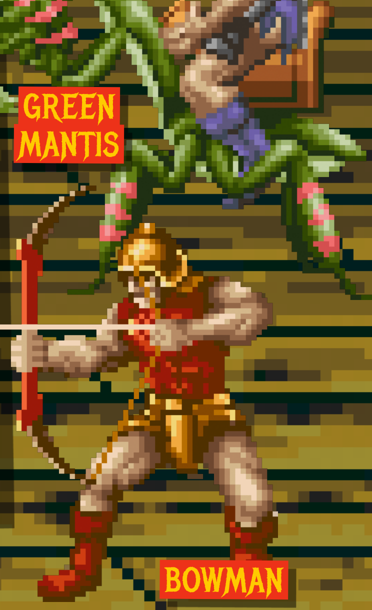
The sequel also addressed criticisms levelled at the original that it was too short and lacked replay value. Each stage – or 'scene' – was now much longer, and there were branching paths which meant that you visited five of the seven scenes during each playthrough (the US version tweaked this, forcing you to play all seven scenes, resulting in an even longer game). On top of all the gameplay improvements, the game looked far better than the original. The characters were larger, more detailed and benefitted from extra frames of animation. In short, the sprite work was phenomenal and it was easily one of the best-looking 2D games of its era. Uchida and his team also deserve credit for using the System 32 hardware to deliver great visual fidelity and performance, and not going full-tilt boogie with the scaling and zooming effects. There were several into-the-screen sections, and sometimes things get flung at the screen, typically for comedic effect, but it was nowhere near as disconcerting as fellow System 32 brawler *Arabian Fight*. ▶

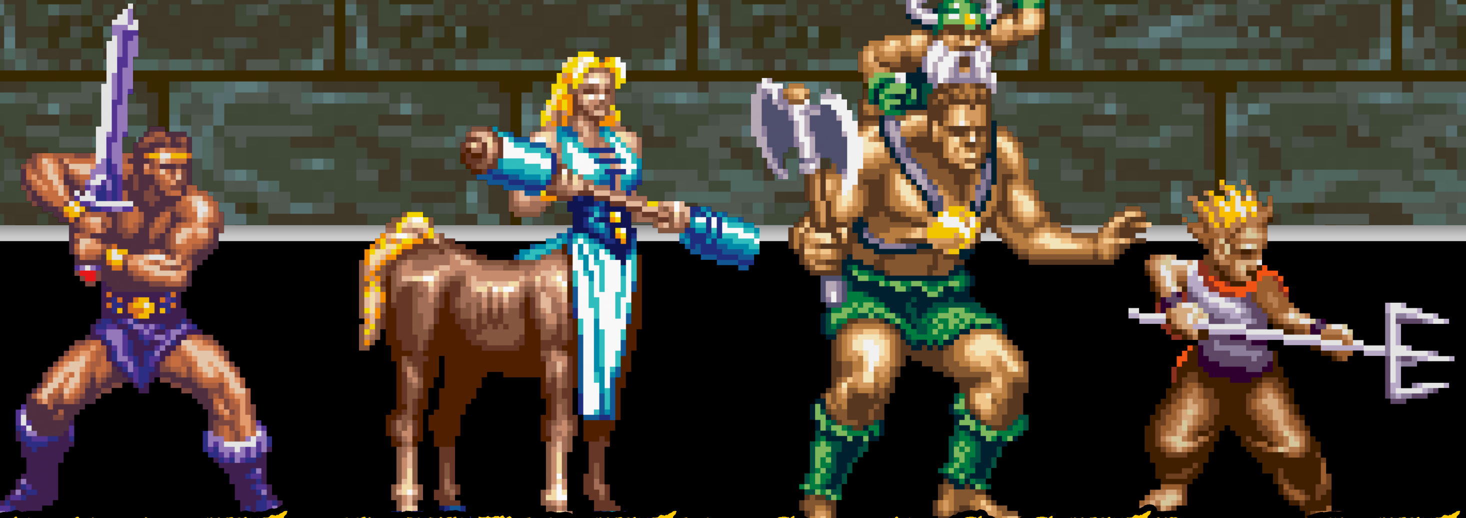

STERN
MAGIC
2 CREDITS TO START
2 CREDITS TO START
2 CREDITS TO START

» [Arcade] By taking the 'Forest' path on scene two you'll encounter a rare golden scorpion that appears nowhere else in the game.


TRIX
DORA
GOAH
MAGIC
MAGIC
MAGIC

» [Arcade] Trix's magic produces tiny trees that give him and every other character a healthy snack. Thanks Trix!


GREEN MANTIS
BOWMAN



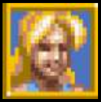
ADVENTURERS ASSEMBLE

THE NEW HEROES FACING DEATH ADDER

STERN BLADE

Like Ax Battler, his equivalent from the original game, sword-wielding Stern possesses the best balance between speed, strength and magic. His special move is a powerful spinning uppercut, while his flame magic is gruesomely effective (although it does require nine vials).

DORA



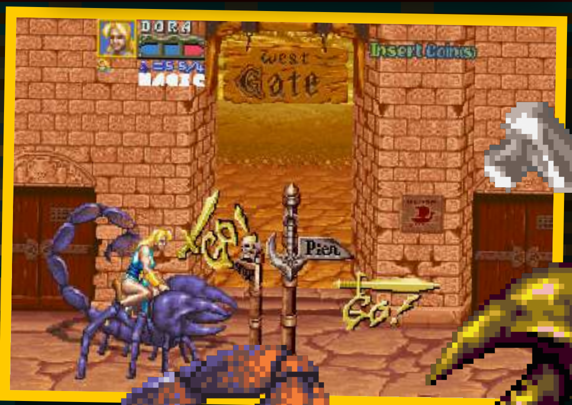
This female centaur looks a little ungainly, but her pugil stick attacks are lightning fast and pretty effective if you mash the attack button. The double-hoof strike is great for crowd control too. On the downside her thunderbolt magic is rubbish and does minimal damage.

GOAH

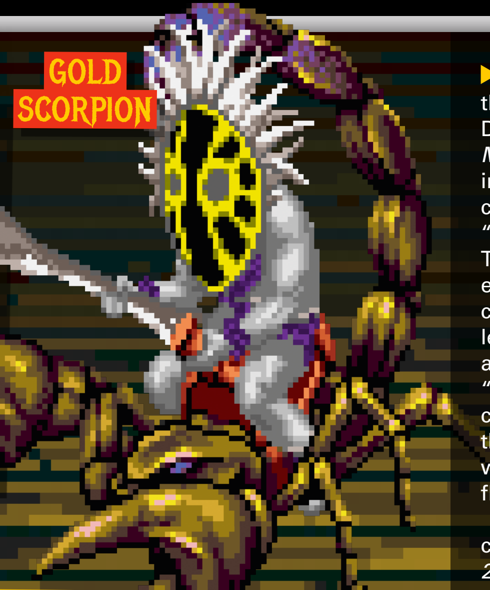
The giant and dwarf are a killer combination. Goah thwacks enemies with his axe while Gilius uses 13 vials to unleash powerful petrifying magic. Their special is a forward somersault that will catch enemies with either Goah's knee or Gulius' horned helmet.

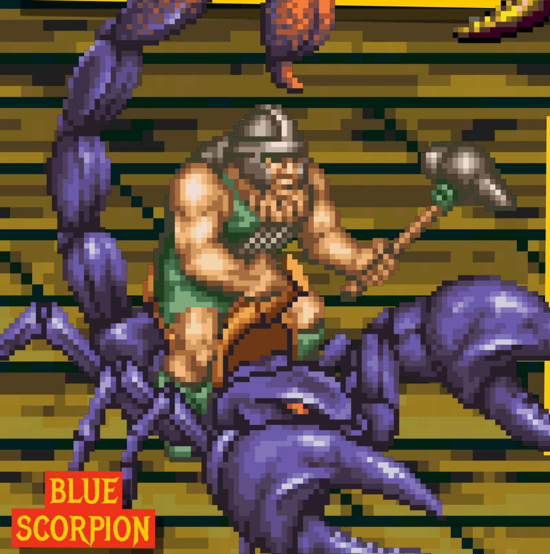
LITTLE TRIX

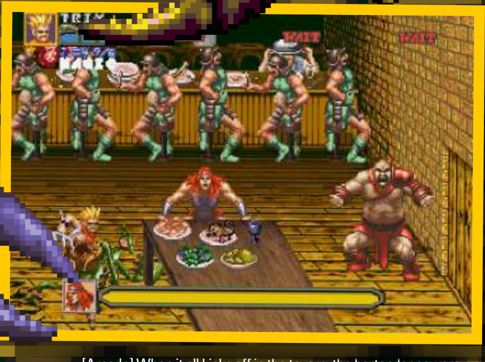
What Trix lacks in strength and stature he makes up for in speed, boasting fast movement and rapid attacks with his three-pronged fork. His magic is unique in that it produces food which replenishes the health of each character, this makes him a valuable team player.



» [Arcade] At two points in the game you get to decide which scene to undertake next.





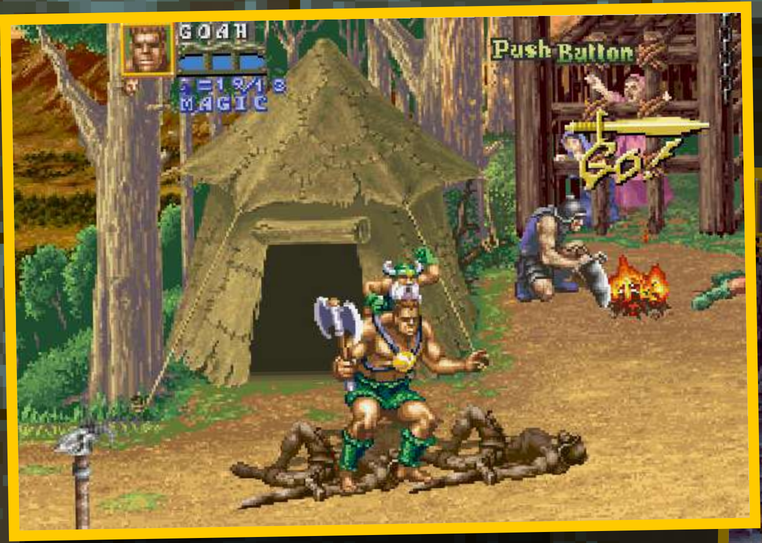


» [Arcade] When it all kicks off in the tavern, the bartender cowers beneath a metal pot. Notice also how there's also a tasty Chickenleg tail stewing in a pot in the background. It's the little touches…

▶ The game's visuals were highlighted in the first Western review that appeared in the December 1992 issue of *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. "To say that the game is graphically intense would be a gross understatement," commented the US mag in its 8/10 review. "Quite simply, one must see it to believe it. The four-player option makes a great game ever better. All in all, a great follow-up to a classic game." In the UK, Sega Zone was less enthusiastic when it played the game at London's ATEI show in 1993, calling it "more of the same" and awarding it 3/5. This comment was perhaps not just a reflection on the game, but brawlers in general, as there was a consensus that the genre had been flogged to death by this point.

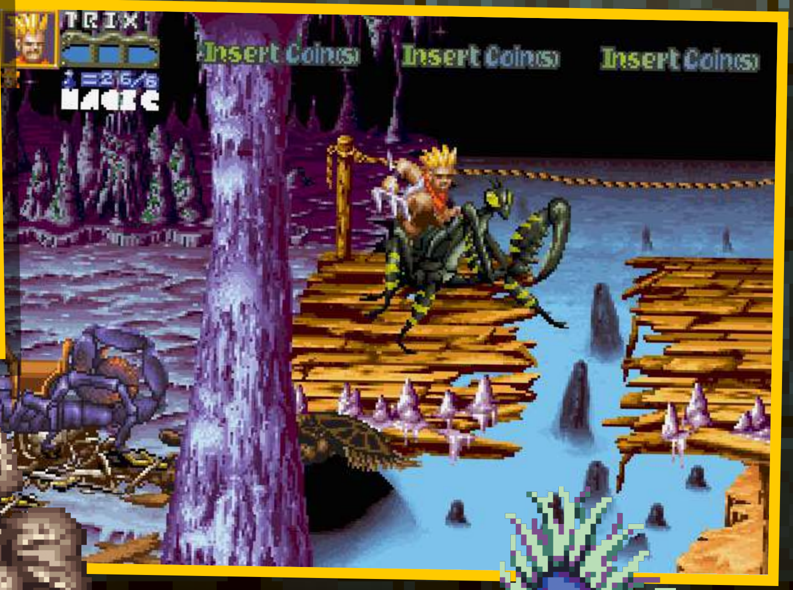
The name of the game seemed to cause confusion. Sega Zone called it '*Golden Axe 2*', while EGM called it '*Golden Axe 3*'! To confuse matters further, later in 1993 Sega released *Golden Axe III* as a Mega Drive exclusive, initially only in Japan. This was not a conversion of *RODA*, but it clearly borrowed a few ideas, including a fresh cast of combatants, new attacks and branching paths. The scenes set in a desert and on a ship were also similar to the 'Gate' and 'Pier' scenes found in *RODA*.

The series returned to the arcades in 1995 with the release of *Golden Axe: The Duel*. It would be this ill-advised one-on-one fighter that was ported to the Saturn, which wasn't surprising seeing as the arcade game essentially ran on Saturn hardware. It was an easy port in other words, which is something



» [Arcade] Besides casting spells, Gilius actively encourages Goah as he cuts a swathe through the enemy forces.

> "You could be playing as Goah, riding on an giant stinging scorpion while catapulting flaming rocks, as Gilius casts petrifying magic"



» [Arcade] The graphics really are wonderful. Here, Trix avoid pitfalls in an atmospheric cave setting.

that couldn't be said about *RODA* and the other System 32 games. In recent years, remaster specialist M2 has revealed just how difficult it is to port Sega's later Super Scaler games to home systems, even when in possession of the original source code. To give you an idea, it took the team two years to convert *Galaxy Force* to the PS2, and they nearly threw in the towel trying to port *Thunder Blade* to the 3DS. And these were games running on hardware that wasn't as advanced or as extravagant as System 32.

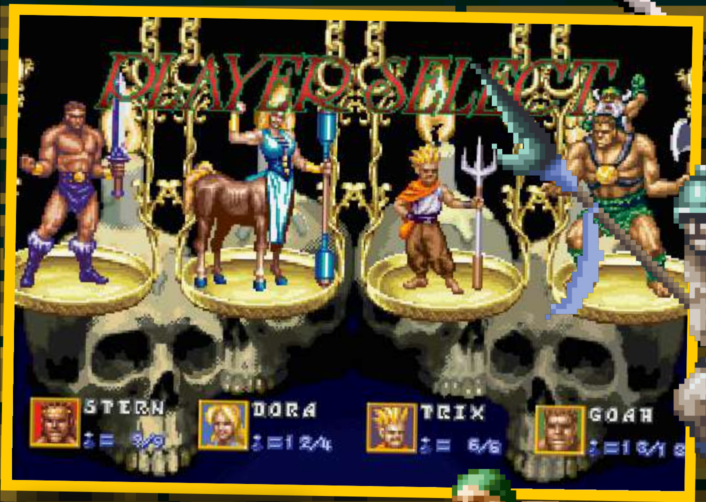
Due to the lack of official conversions, gamers have turned to emulators like Modeler and MAME to get their fix. The video emulation on MAME isn't 100% faithful (this is most noticeable in *RODA*'s 'Cave' scene), but the games are still playable. Happily we now have the Arcade1UP cab and the Astro City Mini tabletop available, and we're pleased to pass on reports that the emulation on both devices is accurate. For true fans of *RODA* the Arcade1UP cab certainly makes a statement, standing almost five feet tall (a foot shorter that the original cab) and featuring accurate reproductions of the control panel, side art and marquee. The monitor is smaller however, at 17 inches compared to the original's 25-inch display. The Astro City Mini obviously has a far smaller 4.8 inch screen, but the device comes with HDMI output for connecting to a display of your choice.

The hope is that now the game has finally made it home, and the emulation issues have been ironed out, we could see it released for other systems. Would it be unreasonable to expect a System 32 collection from Sega, headlined by *RODA* and including other 'lost' titles like *OutRunners*, *Stadium Cross* and *SegaSonic The Hedgehog*? If licences were sorted it could also include *Spider-Man: The Videogame*, *Alien 3: The Gun* and *Jurassic Park*. Come on Sega, don't make us wait ages. ★

STONE FLINGER

NATIVE WARRIOR

SKELETON WARRIOR

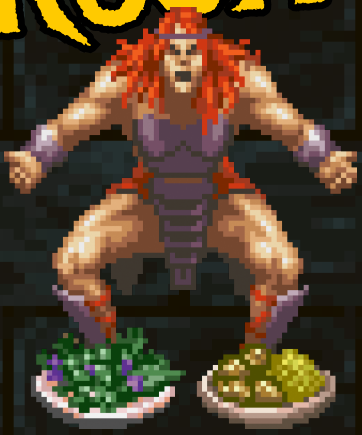


» [Arcade] Four characters are available and four can be selected. In the original, there were three characters to choose from, and only two could play.

GREEN THIEF

BOSS RUSH

HOW TO DEFEAT DEATH ADDER AND HIS DEADLY ALLIES

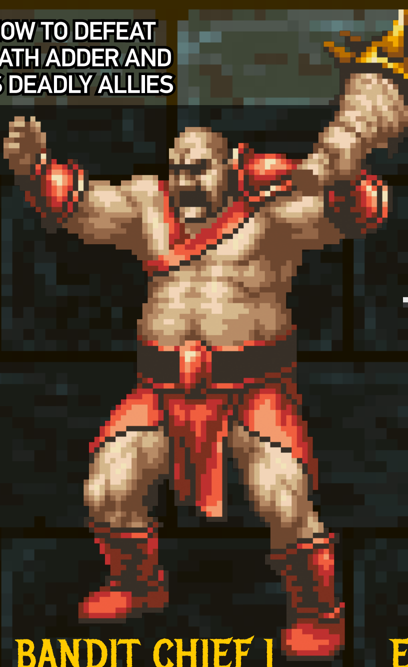


FEMALE WARRIOR 1

You'll encounter this ravenous Red Sonja midway through scene one, and again in scene three. She's fairly weak, but has a dangerous dash attack that you'll want to avoid.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Get in a cheap shot while she's scoffing, then corner her with quick attacks to prevent her from dashing. If you have a mantis this battle will be over in seconds.

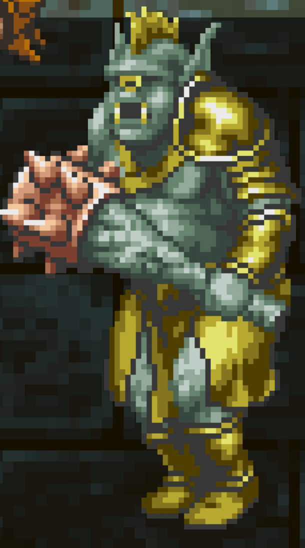


BANDIT CHIEF 1

This burly boss appears at the end of scene one, brandishing a spiked mace, but it's his powerful lunge you need to watch out for. He also has support from other enemies.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

A clubman will conveniently arrive on a scorpion during the battle, so steal that and sting the boss into submission. Only use magic here as a last resort.

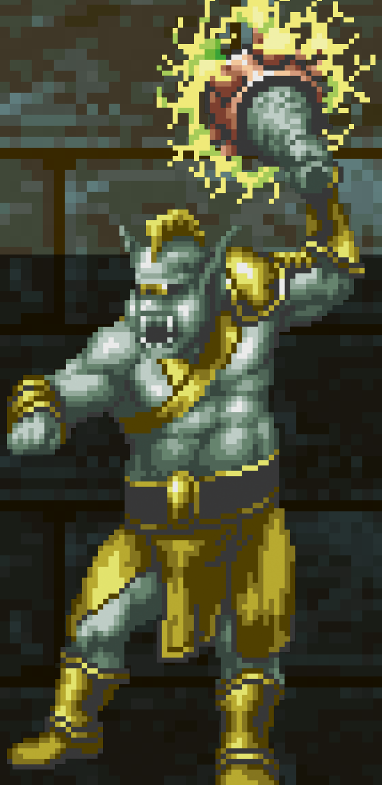


EVIL CYCLOPS 1

Appearing after the marketplace in scene three, this one-eyed beast will try to shoulder barge you, slam you into the ground and shock you with his electrified mace.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Get in some early hits as you move up the alley as he's easier to avoid here. If you don't have a mount then rely on aerial attacks to wear him down.

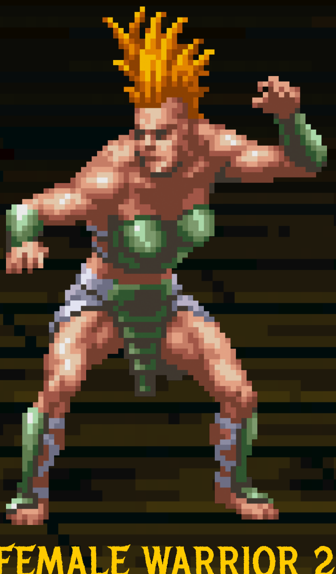


EVIL CYCLOPS 2

Appearing in both scene four paths, this troll may look the same as the first, but he's a fair bit trickier with a more powerful shoulder barge. He swings his mace around more too.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

As before, the best tactic is to keep moving and stay off the ground as much as possible. Cornering him is not advised as he's likely to grapple you.

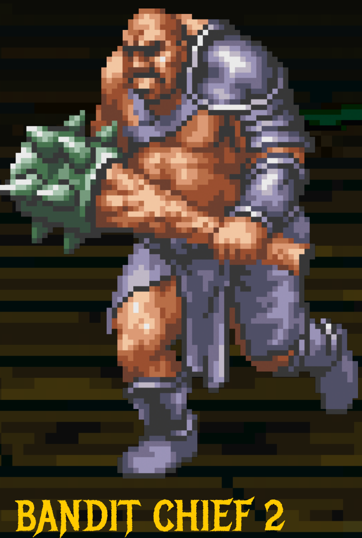


FEMALE WARRIOR 2

Another Amazonian warrior appears early in scene three, and returns at the beginning of scene five along with her 'sister'. They have very similar attacks, including a powerful dash.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

As with the other one, try not to get dashed. You should have a mantis and possibly a spear weapon to speed things along. Do not waste your magic here.

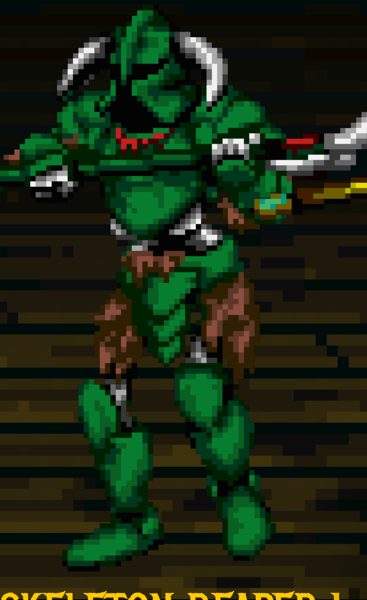


BANDIT CHIEF 2

The Bandit Chief's uglier, less intelligent 'brother' appear towards the end of scene three and returns during scene five with his sibling. They share the same lunging attack.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

As he's little more than a palette swap, the same strategies apply as before – avoid the lunge and use either a creature or quick combos to finish him.

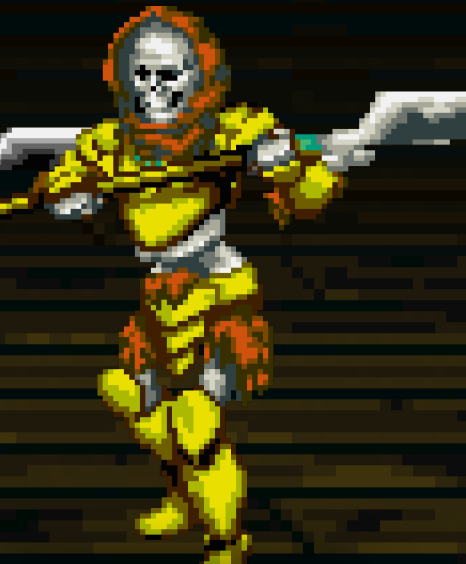


SKELETON REAPER 1

The final scene three boss swings a deadly scythe that has good reach and does lots of damage. Having defeated him, he'll pop up again near the end of scene five.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

This is the first boss battle where magic is not just allowed but recommended, especially if you lack a mount. Beware his quick counterattacks.



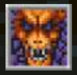
SKELETON REAPER 2

The end of scene four boss shares many abilities with his earlier incarnation, only now he can summon groups of skeletons and evil trees to make this the toughest challenge yet.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Hopefully you have a bunch of magic vials stored up as you should use them here. Just wait until he spawns his cronies so that it clears them out of the way.

DEATH ADDER 1

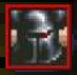


Having reached the end of scene five you'll encounter Death Adder atop his castle. In addition to his axe he carries a living, fire-breathing shield that can easily barbecue you.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Magic is useless here as the shield will suck up your vials. You need to be aggressive, and the best strategy is to try and corner him with quick combo attacks.

DEATH ADDER 2



Having destroyed his shield, you can concentrate on chipping away at Death Adder's *two* remaining health bars. He now unleashes a powerful shockwave attack.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

With his shield gone you can use magic, so empty your supplies. During the second scene, wear him down then stand back and let Gilius deliver the killer blow.

MASTERING THE GAME

WE TALK TACTICS WITH THE GAME'S TWIN GALAXIES HIGH SCORE RECORD HOLDER

When did you first encounter the game, and what did you like about it?

My first contact was in an arcade near my home. I was attracted by the big sprites, the art in general and how you could pummel your opponents. I did miss the characters from the first game, and maybe because of that, I always played with Goah since he carries Gilius.

What made you go for the high score attempt?

I already have some other high score records plus I really like the game, so I decided to go for the record. I thought I'd achieve it easily, but it was no simple task and it took me more than 15 attempts. Sometimes because of losing a life, other times because the game only reveals your score once you complete it.

The fact your score is hidden until the end must make it tricky to know how well you're doing?

The scoring mechanism is quite complex. It counts the number of kills, items you collect and lives you lose. You think you're doing well, but you might have missed something along the way.

Your record run uses Trix. Why did you choose this character?

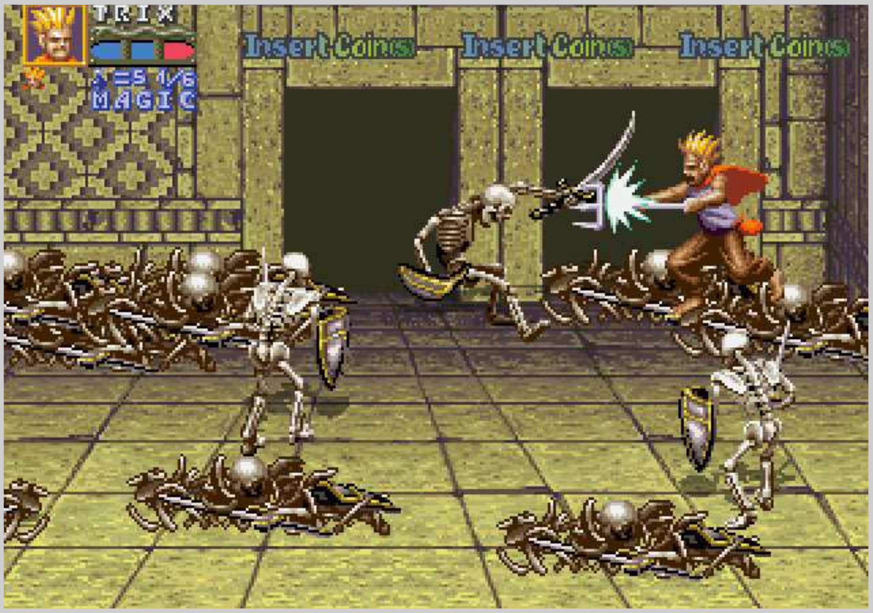
I prefer playing with Goah but I realised that with Trix I can get a higher score because his magic summons health pick-ups which count as items used in the final score. Goah kills enemies faster because of his strength, and his magic is the most powerful in the game, but it's impossible to reach the same score as with Trix because of his magic advantage.

What would be your tips for players attempting to get a high score?

The basic tip is to try to ride a beast for most of the game. This also makes the bosses much easier to beat. Also, saving your magic for the bosses helps a lot too. It's also possible to finish off downed enemies by hitting them from above or burning them.

On the game's high score table the top score is 1,000. Is it even possible to get a score that high?

My score of 817 was done in the World version of the game, which it the one Twin Galaxies currently admits. In this version I don't think it's possible to get a higher score, as I've tried many times to beat my own record, plus another record holder has tried to beat it without success. The US version makes you complete all seven scenes, so the game is extended and I feel in that version you could 'easily' reach a score of 1,000 or more.



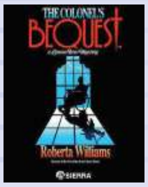
» [Arcade] The best way to battle skeletons is to hit them two or three times, then move up or down to evade their attack, and repeat.

THE STORY OF

THE LAURA BOW MYSTERIES

Sierra On-Line gives the whodunnit a whole new spin in these classic detective adventures. Young reporter Laura Bow braves both a Louisiana bayou and the New York streets to solve grisly murders, armed with only her notebook and her wits

Words by Gem Wheeler



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** SIERRA ON-LINE

» **DEVELOPER:** SIERRA ON-LINE

» **RELEASED:** 1989, 1992

» **PLATFORM:** PC, AMIGA, ST

» **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

BRUCE BALFOUR
The second game in the Laura Bow series was produced, directed and designed by Bruce.

JOSH MANDEL
In addition to writing a two-paragraph proposal for the sequel, Josh also provided character voices.

A sinister mansion filled with deadly secrets is a familiar setting for the puzzle-filled predicaments conjured by many recent games. Back in 1980, though, when Roberta Williams designed Apple II classic *Mystery House* – the first ever graphic adventure – the setting was a revelation. *Mystery House* became a smash hit, and its detective tropes would play a big part in the design of Williams' 1989 MS-DOS title, *The Colonel's Bequest* (released on Amiga and Atari ST the following year). Its heroine, plucky student journalist Laura Bow, finds herself alone in a mansion deep in the Louisiana swamps as, one by one, the other guests at Colonel Henri Dijon's house party are picked off.

The game was directed by Roberta and Chris Iden, while credit for much of its innovative design goes to Jacqueline Austin. Her extensive research in New Orleans and its environs helped to create an atmosphere dripping with menace and mystery. Concerned by the lack of female protagonists in games, Jacqueline pitched a murder plotline set in the silent film era – 1925, to be precise – and featuring a young woman as the player character. Her innovative suggestion that eavesdropping and clue-hunting should govern gameplay is at the heart of *The Colonel's Bequest*'s eerie charm. The dark corners of the dilapidated Misty Acres plantation, not to mention the alligator-filled swamp around it, become more sinister as the clock ticks further into the night.

Artists Douglas Herring and Gerald Moore use a crepuscular palette to evoke the house's moody ambiance, while composer Ken Allen's excellent rendering of music by Satie and Ravel only adds to the tension. As its cast of *Cluedo*-alikes wander the mansion's rooms, squabbling over the colonel's money while a relentless killer lurks, we find ourselves chilled by the brutality of the murders, engrossed by a Civil War-era treasure hunt, and saddened by the terrible consequences of a key character's tragic psychological breakdown. The game's framing as an interactive play justifies the relative absence of puzzles and the concentration on character and setting.

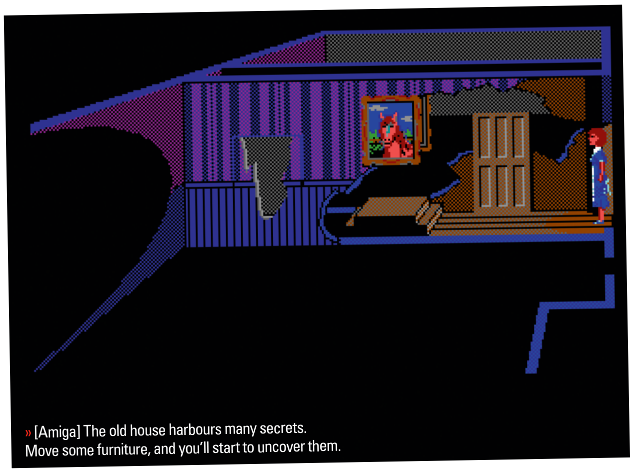
By the time a PC-only sequel appeared in 1992, Jacqueline had moved on, while Roberta took only a creative consultant role on the project. *The Dagger Of Amon Ra* sees our heroine move to New York in 1926 to start a job as a cub reporter for The New

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

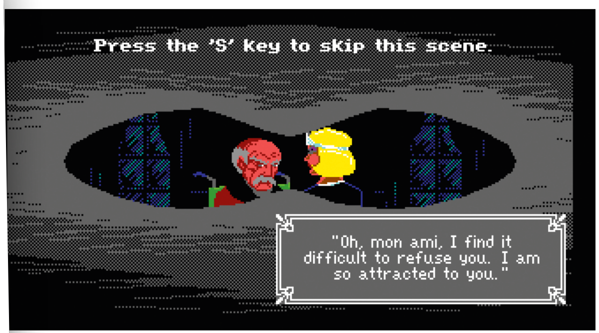
MYSTERY HOUSE
SYSTEM: APPLE II
YEAR: 1980

KING'S QUEST (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: IBM PCJR, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1984

MIXED UP FAIRY TALES
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1991



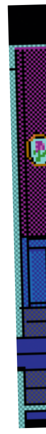
» [Amiga] The old house harbours many secrets. Move some furniture, and you'll start to uncover them.

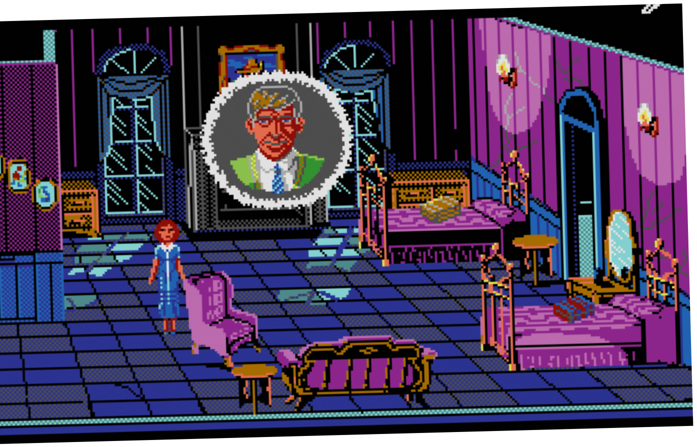


Press the 'S' key to skip this scene.

"Oh, mon ami, I find it difficult to refuse you. I am so attracted to you."

» [Amiga] There are a number of occasions on which you'll wish that you had, indeed, pressed the S key.



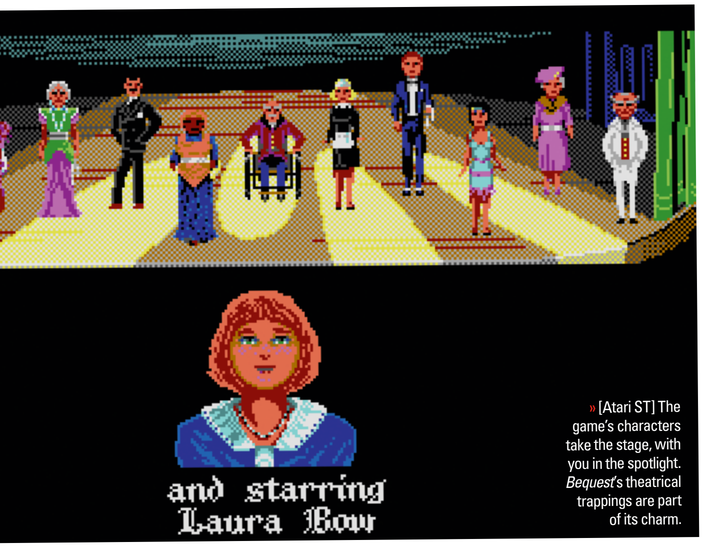


» [Atari ST] Your dad, policeman John Bow, will sometimes appear to you to give advice. Always appreciated, that.

York Daily Register News Tribune (known to locals, thankfully, as The Trib). Tasked with investigating the theft of the titular dagger from the Leyendecker Museum, Laura soon finds herself trapped in the building overnight as another killer cuts a bloody swathe through staff and guests at an ill-fated fundraiser. Lively art deco graphics, a Roaring Twenties soundtrack by Chris Braymen and Mark Seibert, and a tongue-in-cheek script made Laura's second case a worthy follow-up.

Bruce Balfour directed, produced, and designed *The Dagger Of Amon Ra*. With a background in writing, film and computer science, the one-time NASA employee, academic, novelist and racing driver was the ideal man for the job. (His life would make for quite the adventure game, it must be said.)

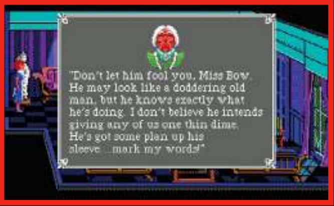
The company culture at Sierra On-Line was sometimes pretty cut-throat, as Bruce makes clear. "Things could get weird at times. There was a point when [Sierra CEO and cofounder with wife, Roberta] Ken Williams decided to lay off part of the staff, but for whatever perverse reason, he made a game out of it. The staff was invited to a big meeting in the downstairs conference room, and I remember a lot of people were mooing like cows being herded to ►



» [Atari ST] The game's characters take the stage, with you in the spotlight. *Bequest*'s theatrical trappings are part of its charm.

GIVE US A CLUE

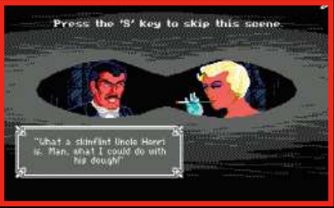
Who's in pursuit of the Colonel's Bequest?



"Don't let him fool you, Miss Bow. He may look like a doddering old man, but he knows exactly what he's doing. I don't believe he intends giving any of us one thin dime. He's got some plan up his sleeve...mark my words!"

GERTRUDE DIJON

Gertie's the widow of the colonel's late brother, Jacques. Proud of her two glamorous children and disdainful of her in-laws, she's a relic of the past with the snobbery to match. Still, you won't have to put up with her for long…

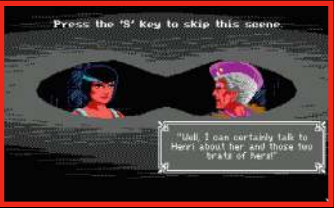


Press the 'S' key to skip this scene.

"What a skinflint Uncle Henri is. Man, what I could do with his dough!"

RUDY DIJON AND GLORIA SWANSONG

These faintly incestuous siblings are trouble. Gloria's an actress whose career has fallen on hard times following a scandal, while Rudy's lavish lifestyle has left him short of money. They've both got a motive, but Gloria's feather boa will be her undoing. Those screen sirens, eh?

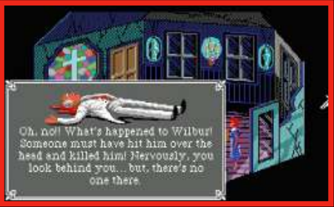


Press the 'S' key to skip this scene.

"Well, I can certainly talk to Henri about her and those two brats of hers!"

ETHEL AND LILLIAN PRUNE

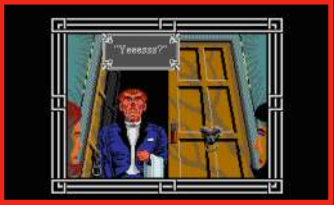
Never the better for drink, Ethel is the colonel's sister. After her husband's suicide, her relationship with her unhappy daughter Lillian deteriorated. Lillian seems typical of the decade's bright young things, but behind the cheerful façade lurks a terrible misery that will reveal itself during this long night.



Oh, no!! What's happened to Wilbur! Someone must have hit him over the head and killed him! Nervously, you look behind you... but, there's no one there.

DR WILBUR C FEELS

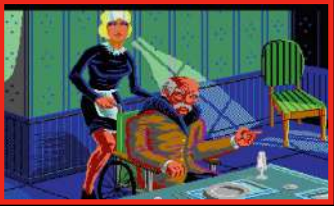
The not-so-good doctor is possibly sampling a few too many of the wares he carries around in his black bag. Quite apart from his wandering hands, he shares a secret with the colonel's shifty lawyer, Clarence Sparrow, that will bring about their downfall.



"Yeeesss?"

JEEVES

Jeeves is the colonel's seemingly devoted butler and fits the stereotype of that profession to a tee. His relationship with Fifi is more pleasure than business, but their evening would have gone a lot better if they'd skipped the cognac and gone straight to dessert.



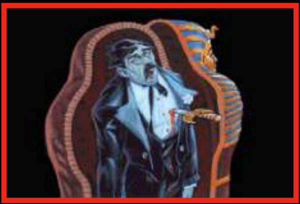
FIFI

Fifi's officially the mansion's housemaid and unofficially the colonel's lover. Like Yvette Delacroix in *Dagger*, she's a sexy French stereotype; also like Yvette, she's a fundamentally decent person who meets a very nasty end. Only kind housekeeper Celie is left standing as dawn finally rises.

Places
Things
Misc.

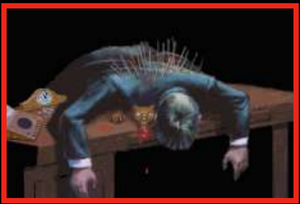
MURDER MOST MURDER

Six of Dagger's grisliest deaths



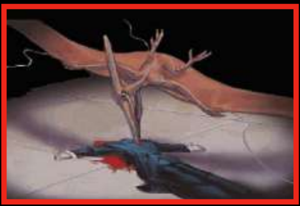
PIPPIN CARTER

Pippin Carter has big plans to take over the Leyendecker, but the career of the pompous archaeologist ends tonight. He becomes the evening's first casualty, entombed in one of the Egyptian exhibit's sarcophagi. To add insult to fatal injury, the murder weapon's one of the gift shop's knock-offs, too.



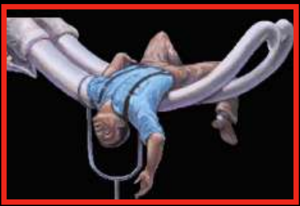
ARCHIBALD CARRINGTON III

The Leyendecker's new boss isn't all he seems. While the seemingly mild-mannered Englishman is polite enough, there's something not quite right about him – and that's before you find him impaled on a giant stuffed porcupine in his office. The poor thing's face says it all, really, doesn't it?



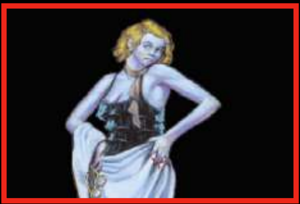
ZIGGY ZIEGFELD

Ziggy was never likely to make old bones, given his propensity for squealing. That said, he probably would have expected a concrete overcoat rather than a sticky end on the beak of a replica pterodactyl. If you're wondering where his head is, check out the specimens in the anthropology room.



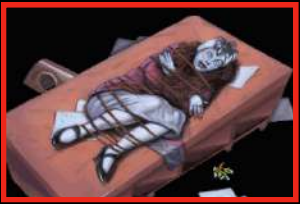
ERNIE LEACH

Poor Ernie just wanted to make enough dough for a better life and to build a future with Yvette. Unfortunately, one of her several other paramours doesn't take too kindly to being cuckolded. The alcohol preservation vats are privy to a number of misdeeds in this game, and Ernie's drowning is one.



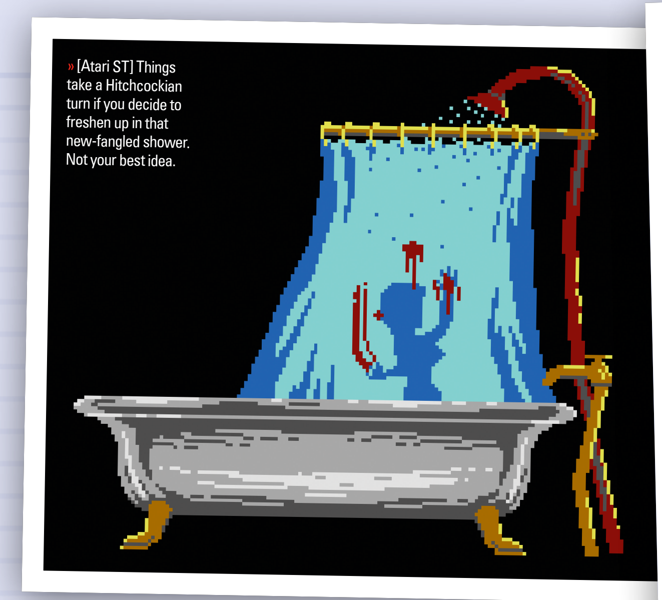
YVETTE DELACROIX

The sultry Gallic curator, Yvette, is called every name under the sun by lustful admirers and jealous rivals alike. Most players will find themselves appreciating her joie de vivre and feeling rather sad on the discovery that the new 'statue' in the portrait gallery is harbouring a dreadful secret.



COUNTESS LAVINIA WALDORF-CARLTON

The countess is a slippery customer with a wavering upper-crust accent and dubious credentials. As Yvette puts it, "People die when she's around." Her life of crime is brought to an abrupt conclusion on her unhappy meeting with eccentric curator Olympia Myklos' snake. Who tied her up, though?

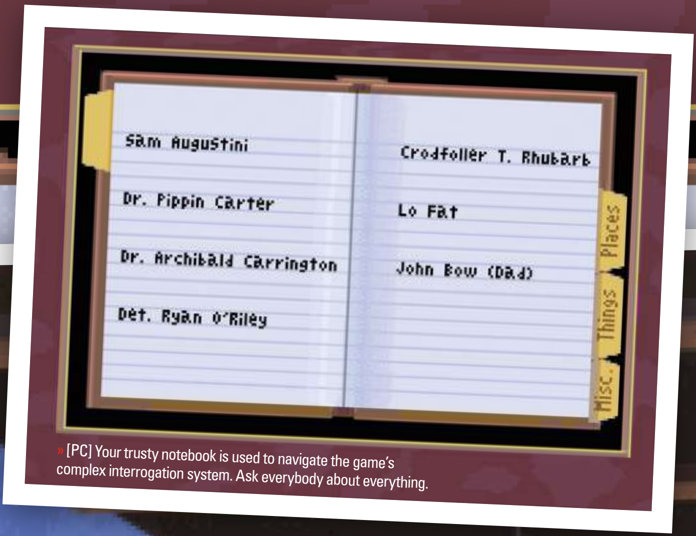


» [Atari ST] Things take a Hitchcockian turn if you decide to freshen up in that new-fangled shower. Not your best idea.

slaughter. Everyone took random seats as usual. As the meeting started, the attendees were informed that there were envelopes taped under each chair. When the envelopes were opened, the recipient would learn whether or not they had just been fired. That didn't go over very well."

There was relatively little to link *Dagger* with the first entry in the series, as Bruce explains. "*The Colonel's Bequest* was already an old game by the time I showed up at Sierra, so the technology had advanced quite a bit to allow for better graphics, audio and so on. Ken and Roberta wanted to revive the Laura Bow character and [writer] Josh Mandel wrote a two-paragraph proposal for a mystery sequel, *Laura Bow 2*, about a missing dagger in a museum that Laura would investigate. Other than it being an adventure game with the same lead character, I don't recall much of a connection to *Bequest*."

Josh Mandel's comic talent provides the game with a lot of its charm. He also lent his voice to several of its colourful characters, as was the norm for Sierra's 'talkie' adventures. "Bruce felt, I think, that most of the characters could effectively be voiced by Sierra employees, with proper direction, while he would plan to hire professionals for the major roles. I played five of the voices, although some of those were extremely small parts. For Sam Augustini, Laura's boss at the New York Daily Register News Tribune, I wanted the character to be surly but intelligent, so I channelled Andy Rooney, the late commentator who appeared in newspapers and on the TV news show *60 Minutes* for many years. For Steve Dorian, Laura's boytoy, Bruce kept wanting me to play him in a low register. I tried but couldn't quite get my voice deep enough to match Bruce's vision. So my voice had to be treated electronically to make it even lower and more resonant. I think, in the end, you can probably tell that there's something not quite right about Steve's voice! Rocco, the cab driver, was easy for me. I was born and raised in New York, so a Brooklyn accent came pretty easily. Not so much for my rendition of [French] coroner Henri Le Mort!" Rex



Sam Augustini

Dr. Pippin Carter

Dr. Archibald Carrington

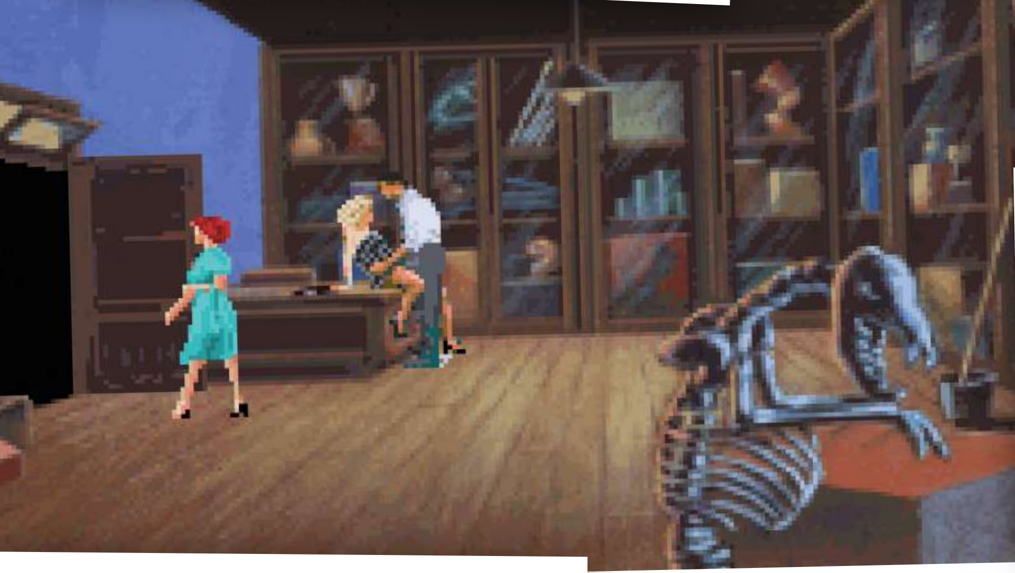
Det. Ryan O'Riley

Crodfoller T. Rhubarb

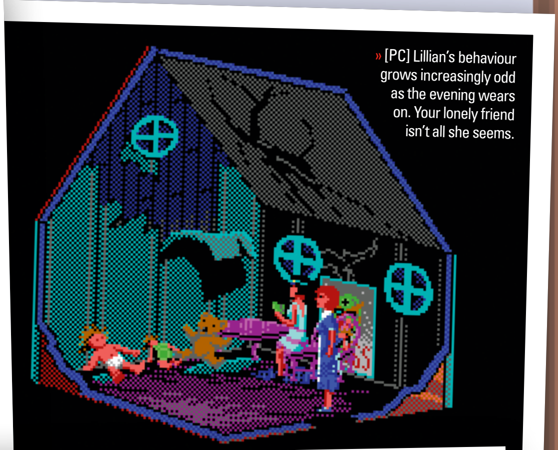
Lo Fat

John Bow (Dad)

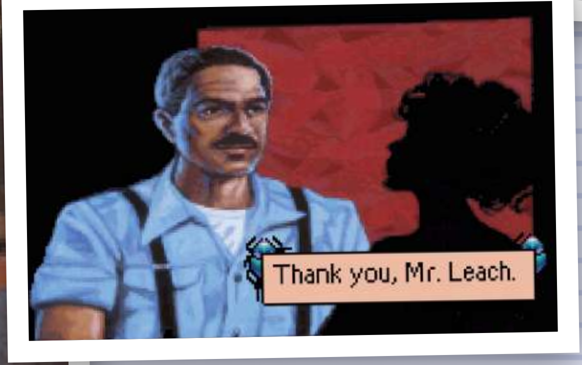
» [PC] Your trusty notebook is used to navigate the game's complex interrogation system. Ask everybody about everything.



» [PC] Yes, you probably should leave, to be honest. After all, your nose for news has its limits.

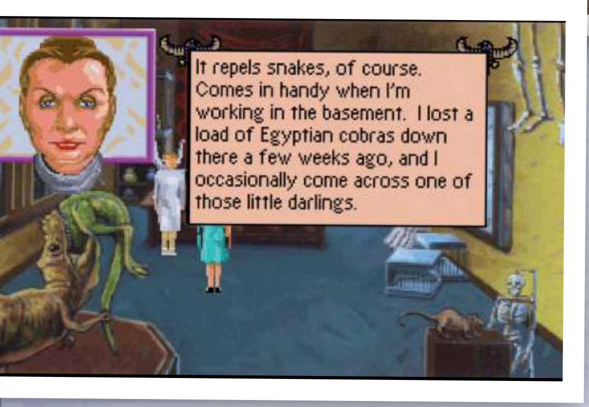


» [PC] Lillian's behaviour grows increasingly odd as the evening wears on. Your lonely friend isn't all she seems.



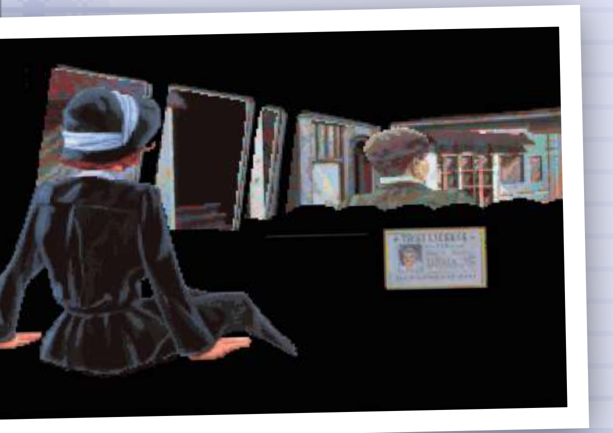
Thank you, Mr. Leach.

» [PC] Some of the graphical choices in *Dagger* are strikingly atmospheric and really add to the game's air of mystery.



It repels snakes, of course. Comes in handy when I'm working in the basement. I lost a load of Egyptian cobras down there a few weeks ago, and I occasionally come across one of those little darlings.

» [PC] Olympia Myklos is a delightfully dotty Greek curator with a fondness for dead things and men with scars. Also, snakes.



» [PC] You can take a taxi to get around New York, or, if you're feeling brave, you can walk.

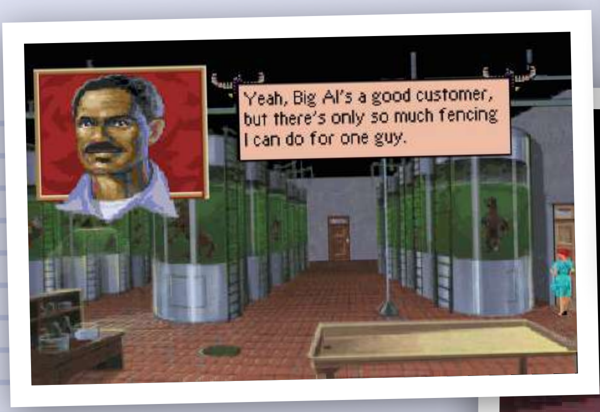
the Talking Dinosaur, one of the Leyendecker's more entertaining exhibits, is a particular highlight on Josh's lengthy voiceover CV.

Bruce got his chance to act, too. "Sierra fans really enjoyed having the designers and other staff acting out the dialogue", he says. "I did the voices for three characters: Dr Pippin Carter, [German security guard] Wolf Heimlich and Ziggy Ziegfeld. We had a 600-page script that took months to write, and Josh Mandel also helped with in-game text for the hundreds of little animations and objects that players could click on in the game. We used in-house bodies for the rotoscoped video from the motion capture stage and several in-house voices, but opened up the voice casting because there were some complicated accents and more advanced acting skills required for some parts. We went as far as the Defence Language Institute in Monterey, California, to find a good Egyptian accent." Laura herself – along with French seductress Yvette Delacroix and the game's amusingly plummy British narrator – was voiced by the multi-talented Leslie Wilson, who, rather touchingly, would end up becoming Bruce's very own leading lady a few years later.

The game's full of memorably grisly deaths which are funny and disturbing in equal measure. When questioned on this, Josh maintains his innocence. "Oh, that was pure Bruce. He has a very dry, very sophisticated sense of humour and a highly developed sense of the macabre. I'm sure the ideas for the various methods of murdering the characters came fairly easily to him. Some of the humour is also attributable to [Josh's co-writer] Lorelei Shannon and me. Lorelei designed [1996 horror adventure] *Phantasmagoria 2*, and if you look her up on Amazon, you'll find she has multiple books, both fiction and non-fiction, that all revolve around the macabre in one way or another. And for my part, I was really just taking my cues off of what I saw Bruce doing. When I worked at Sierra, I specialised in sort of quasi-ghostwriting for other designers and channelling their style, which is why I ended up writing in Al Lowe's voice on several *Leisure Suit Larry* projects, in the Two Guys From Andromeda's voice for *Space Quest IV*, in Roberta's voice for *King's Quest I SCI* and so on. Writing on *Dagger* was a joy, because Bruce gave Lorelei and I a lot of latitude, so we had fun developing droll, dark material that matched Bruce's style for the game."

> "The Colonel's Bequest was already an old game by the time I showed up at Sierra, so the technology had advanced quite a bit to allow for better graphics, audio and so on"
>
> **BRUCE BALFOUR**

Bruce did a vast amount of work on planning the structure of the labyrinthine Leyendecker and conducted an extensive investigation of the era's iconography. "Roberta modelled Laura Bow on the early film star Clara Bow. Agatha Christie novels and old movies like *The Maltese Falcon* were good sources for style and misdirection. I did a lot of research into the



Yeah, Big Al's a good customer, but there's only so much fencing I can do for one guy.

» [PC] Animated portraits with lip-synched, fully voiced dialogue make *Dagger*'s many conversations a pleasure to watch.

» [PC] Is it too much of a spoiler to say that you do eventually find the thing? Oh well.

» [PC] Clue: the password is the surname of the actress who played Madge in *Neighbours*. And, er, a Twenties dance. Yes.

DRINK
KIE
Flowers
TAXI

Nice weather we're having.

» [PC] The docks are rough, but you get to chat up dishy Steve there. Silver linings, and all that…

"Roberta modelled Laura Bow on the early film star Clara Bow. Agatha Christie novels and old movies like The Maltese Falcon were good sources for style and misdirection"
JOSH MANDEL

'Egyptomania' that swept over the US after Howard Carter discovered the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922, when there were ancient-Egyptian-themed parties and high-society cults. I also looked at the floor plans and room descriptions of several old New York museums."

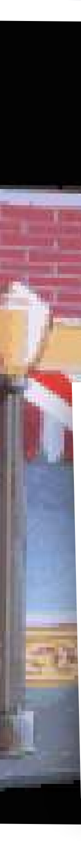
Josh remembers the amount of effort Bruce put in with awe. "This simply required a breathtaking amount of pre-planning, documentation and organisation on Bruce's part. There were no shortcuts that could be taken and no templates of any sort from which he could work. He developed an enormous design document which, if I remember correctly, was broken down by 'rooms', which was the standard procedure at Sierra, and then each room was broken down further according to the time within the game structure, and then by the characters and animations required for each time. The clues needed to be imparted by each character were also listed, according the correct time. But this is only as I'm remembering it 25 years later. What I remember most vividly is what a logistical nightmare it was to construct. Fortunately for me, I wasn't the one who had to worry about it."

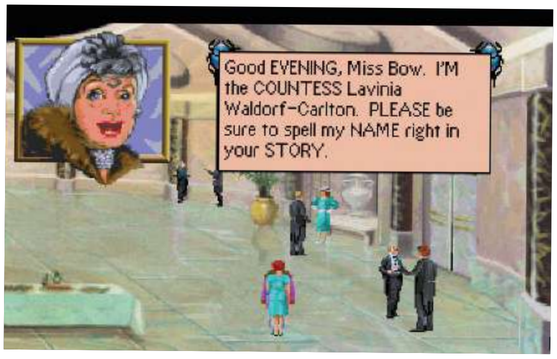
Bruce himself is quick to credit other members of the creative team for their sterling work. "[Creative director] Bill Davis introduced us to the work of JC Leyendecker, who was a very popular commercial illustrator during the first part of the 20th century, and his style fit well with the art deco look of the 1920s. [Art designer] Bob Gleason and [production designer] Andy Hoyos had the art skills to take the Leyendecker style and run with it, and that gave the game its stylish and classy look appropriate to the high-society shenanigans we had going on in the museum we named after Leyendecker. After the art was created based on the description in the room design, I could then use those visual details to add more atmosphere in the object descriptions or make period references in the dialogue that would add to the feeling of Twenties New York."

Bruce came up with some new features that challenged the limitations of what was then considered possible in an adventure game. "I was mostly free to do whatever I wanted as long as I got things done, and enough time had passed since the first game that the technology had advanced to give us more options," he says. "Sierra was always pushing the envelope of what was technically possible to do on a PC. They had developed their Sierra Creative Interpreter [SCI] as their in-house coding platform, and there was a back room with a bunch of systems programmers crammed into it whom we rarely saw. This was also an incentive for the SCI coders to keep working at Sierra since it was an in-house language and wasn't exactly a transferable skill if they wanted to get up and go to another game company.

"The back-room people had just developed a tool for the designers so we could link the dialogue lines from our scripts directly to characters in particular scenes, thereby reducing the chance of getting the wrong words coming out of a character's mouth. This meant we had to go through the script line-by-line and tag everything with special codes. A tedious process, but it was faster than writing the short chunks of assembly language code I'd had to do at Interplay. We also pushed the limits to get good sound, rotoscoped animation on top of the painted backgrounds, and the magnifying glass tool that worked like a real magnifying glass when the player passed it over parts of a room."

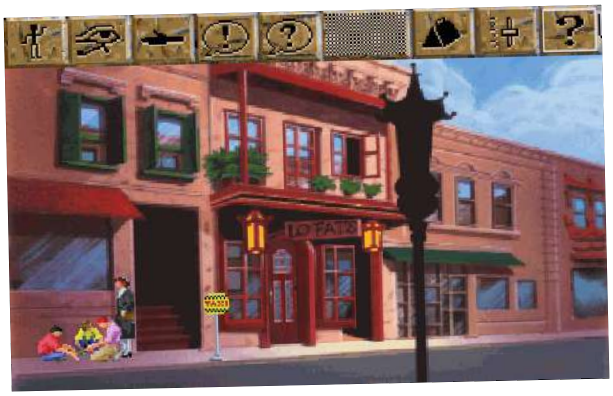
While *Dagger* received good reviews, some players criticised what they considered to be a high difficulty level. Josh finds this unfair. "I was disappointed in the reception at the time, and I still am," he admits. "I came from text adventure 'roots'. I'm perfectly comfortable with taking notes and drawing maps, and when point-and-click gaming came along, players started expecting the game to take care of all that. Gamers got lazier, and I saw the reaction to *Dagger* as emblematic of that decline. People were caught up short at the end of the game when they had to answer questions about what happened, and I got the feeling they resented it. That seemed to be their primary objection. My attitude was 'It's an interactive murder mystery,





Good EVENING, Miss Bow. I'M the COUNTESS Lavinia Waldorf-Carlton. PLEASE be sure to spell my NAME right in your STORY.

» [PC] Yes, she talks like this throughout the entire game. You can see the snake's point of view, in some ways.



» [PC] *Dagger's* intuitive point-and-click interface superseded the text parser used for commands in *The Colonel's Bequest*.

folks, what did you expect? Did you want the murder to solve itself by the end of the story?' On the other hand, they seemed to really like the art, and, of course, they loved Jane Jensen's song-and-dance routine [Jensen plays the singer at a speakeasy early in the game, performing Bruce's risqué and period-appropriate ditty *The Archaeologist Song*]. So they did exhibit some taste!"

With the case of the missing dagger solved, there would be no further mysteries for Laura Bow. Josh attributes this to *Dagger*'s middling sales and Roberta Williams' interest in other projects. Bruce, tongue firmly in cheek, offers another thought, "You know how television shows with amateur private detectives often stretch the bounds of credulity by getting their amateur sleuths involved in so many murders? I would joke that in a third *Laura Bow* adventure the player would get half way into the game and discover that Laura Bow was actually a clever serial killer investigating her own crimes for the newspaper. Nobody wanted to take me up on that one, for some reason."

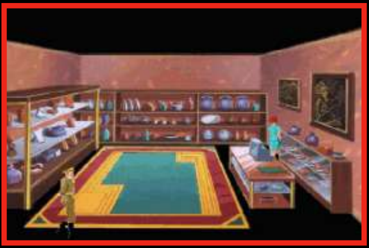
To quote another legendary sleuth, though: just one more thing. Next time you play Jane Jensen's seminal 1993 adventure, *Gabriel Knight: Sins Of The Fathers*, take a closer look at the noticeboard in Laura's alma mater, Tulane University. You'll see an advert for a special lecture by octogenarian Pulitzer Prize winner, Laura Bow-Dorian. Not a bad ending for The Trib's cub reporter, one of gaming's all-too-scarce female leads. *

THE ART OF MURDER

How Dagger captured Twenties New York

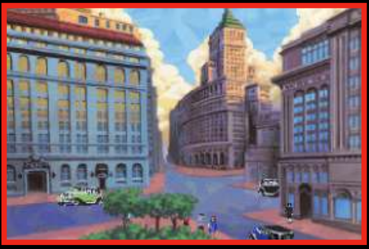
ART DECO

Distinguished by its pleasing geometric forms, striking colours, and influences drawn from a variety of cultures – ancient Egypt amongst them – art deco dominated the years after World War I. It's found throughout *Dagger*, from interstitial imagery to the many stylish rugs found in the game's offices and reception rooms.



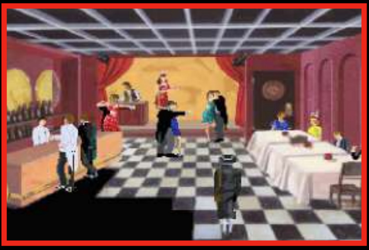
NEW YORK STREETS

Laura finds herself in a Big Apple of gangsters, cops, and stool pigeons: taxis hover, towers soar and news is made. She also learns, to her cost, that you should always keep some money in your shoe, just in case. Oops. Turns out listening to dad is a very wise move.



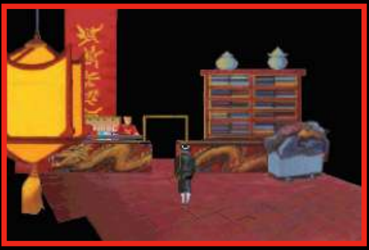
SPEAKEASY

Prohibition's taken alcohol off the streets, but a lubricated good time can still be had, if you know where to look… and if someone's whispered the right password in your ear. Know your way around the dances of the era? Then you'll be in like Flynn. Put your dancing shoes on and go for it.



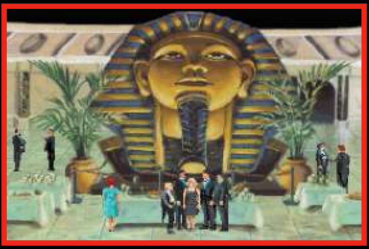
CHINATOWN

Josh Mandel regrets the game's broad ethnic stereotypes, which, in hindsight, he wishes weren't present. The allegedly Chinese laundry owner, Lo Fat, will certainly raise modern eyebrows. On the plus side, Black caretaker and WWI veteran, Ernie Leach, is one of the game's best characters, played with charm by Dennis Lewis.



EGYPTOLOGY

Howard Carter's discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb and its treasures made Egyptology a craze in the Twenties. The game doesn't shy away from the ethics surrounding the removal – many would say theft – of artefacts from Egypt, controversial then and now. *Dagger*'s artists did a magnificent job of rendering the museum's holdings.



Misc. Things Places

Ranma

Ranma ½: Hard Battle

WHERE POTTIES AND FURRY DICE ARE WEAPONS

» SNES » 1993 » OCEAN

There comes a time in everyone's life when you realise that if you don't treat yourself at Christmas, no one else will. For me, it was in the early Nineties, after I'd got a job and left home but before I started a family of my own, and suddenly finding myself with a thing called 'disposal income'. I had bought a SNES and didn't shudder at the thought of dropping £50 on a cartridge. An old school friend, Paul, had introduced me to some offbeat Japanese imports via his Super Famicom and so when I heard *Ranma ½* was getting a PAL release, I thought it would make the perfect gift – to myself.

Based on a long-running manga series, the game is reassuringly bonkers. The main character, Ranma Saotome, can take the form of a boy or girl (it's all to do with cursed pools and water temperatures, apparently), allowing for some very personal battles of the sexes. There's a giant placard-waving panda, Mousse and his deadly swan-shaped potty and the unfortunately monikered Pantyhose, who seems driven by *A Boy Named Sue* levels of anger if his demonic alter ego is anything to go by.

The characters may have been bemusing but the gameplay was surprisingly straightforward. Most attacks required a simple prod of one of the face buttons and even special moves didn't require memorising lengthy button combos but relied on holding down a couple of buttons for a few seconds to unleash. The game became hugely popular at a play-scheme for children with learning difficulties that I worked at, a testament to its accessibility as well as an age-appropriate response when the kids pestered us for *Mortal Kombat II*.

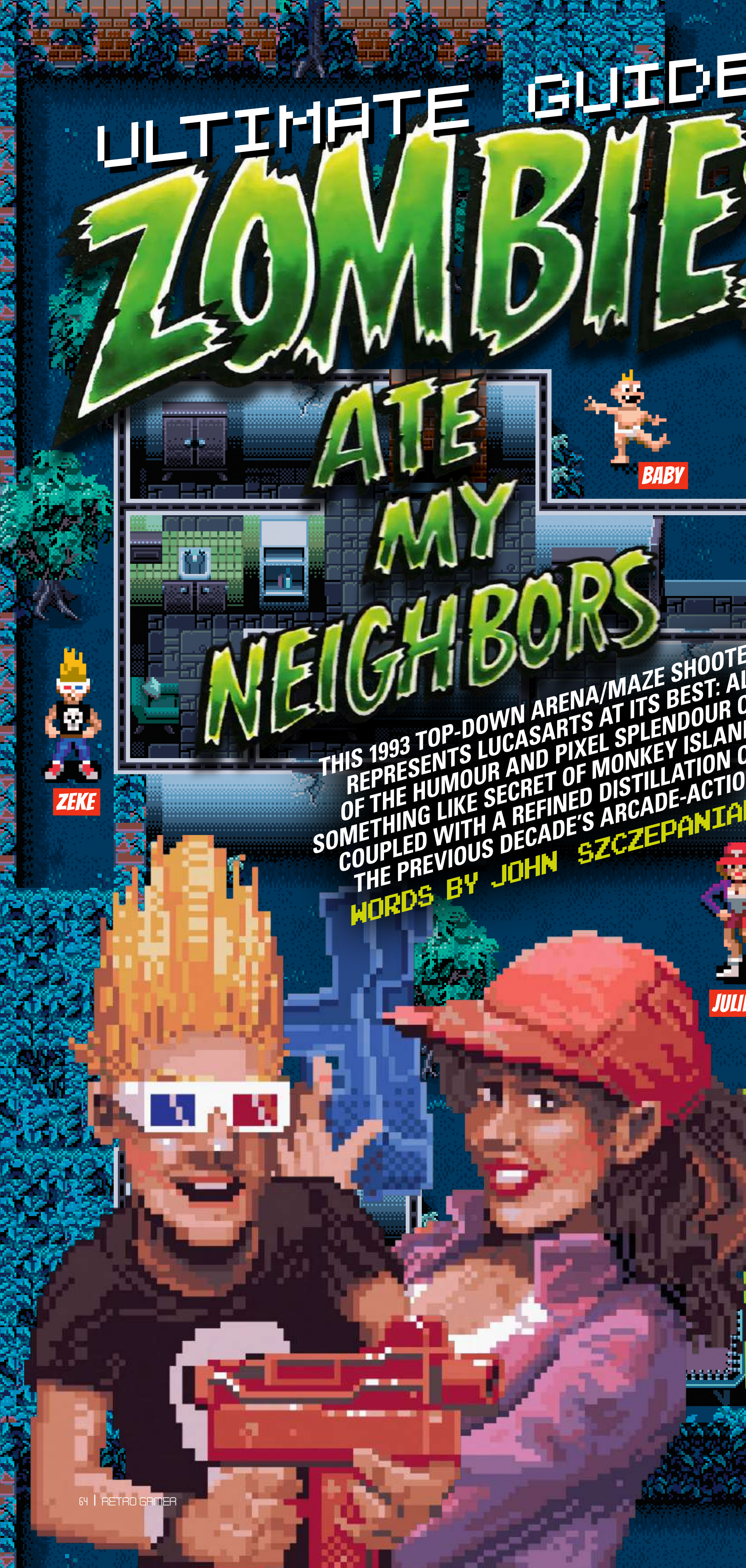
My memories of the game remain strong mainly due to the prescient nature of the gender fluidity at its core, though. Paul transitioned to Faye a few years later and immersed herself in needlework, devoting countless hours to producing intricately embroidered depictions of female fighters from various videogame beat-'em-ups. You may even remember her work from a feature in issue 18. I still have the cross-stitched Chun-Li she gave me one Christmas after her surgery. *

ULTIMATE GUIDE

ZOMBIES ATE MY NEIGHBORS

THIS 1993 TOP-DOWN ARENA/MAZE SHOOTER REPRESENTS LUCASARTS AT ITS BEST: ALL OF THE HUMOUR AND PIXEL SPLENDOUR OF SOMETHING LIKE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND, COUPLED WITH A REFINED DISTILLATION OF THE PREVIOUS DECADE'S ARCADE-ACTION

WORDS BY JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

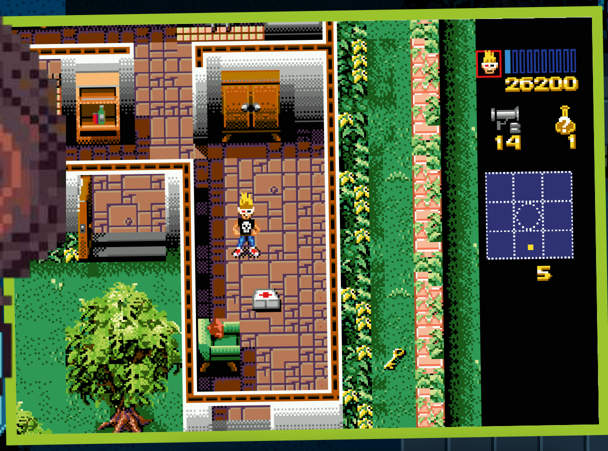


SOLDIER
DOG
EXPLORER

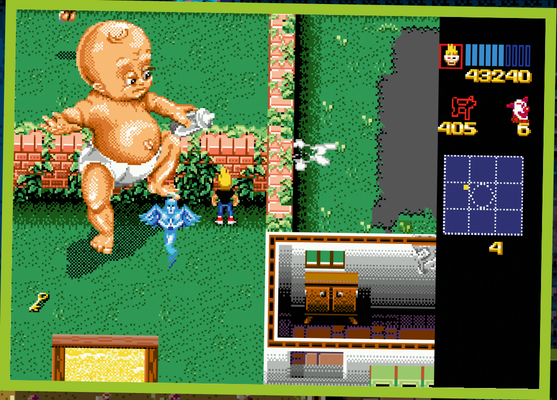
It wasn't always going to be called this. According to the manual Mike Ebert and his team at LucasArts were considering a variety of titles, including *Return Of The Teenage Son Of The Bride Of A Zombie, Part 2*. Given the NTSC/PAL name change, and America's misspelling of 'neighbour', we're just going to refer to it as *ZAMN* from here on. But this exemplifies the sort of cheeky, comedic fun everyone was having bringing a game (about the undead) to life.

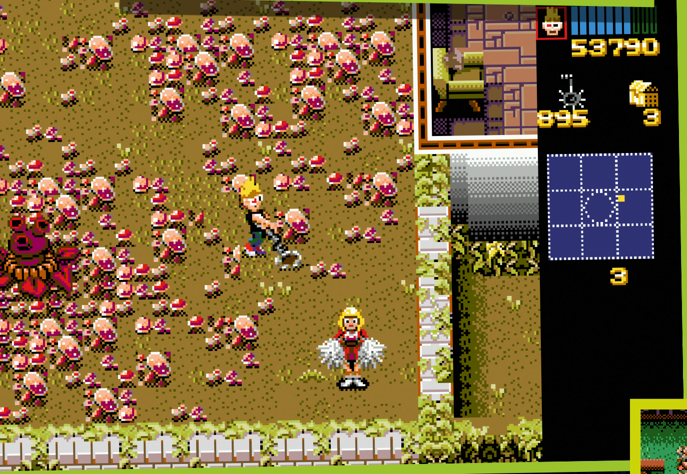
There's no consensus on precisely when *ZAMN* launched, other than around the second half of 1993. It was the year that brought us *Star Fox* and *Sonic CD*, closing out with the US congressional hearings on violent games. In a lot of ways *ZAMN* is a perfect example of the zeitgeist of this moment in time: LucasArts was riding high on a wave of successes, including the first two *Secret Of Monkey Island* games and *Super Star Wars*; the 16-bit consoles were in their ascent, trying to outdo each other; although CD media was around, the PlayStation was over a year away and 2D games still flourished; there was not yet an Entertainment Software Ratings Board in the US, meaning the only 'content guidance' came from platform holders. The world was a simpler place. Plus, of course, the preceding 60 years had produced a rich catalogue of eclectic and entertaining cinema.

Such an intense focal point in the crossroads of space and time and media would gift us all



» [Mega Drive] Items are found lying around, inside jars, cupboards, dustbins, chests, cabinets, under sinks… touch everything!





» [Mega Drive] Sometimes these plants produce brown spiky weeds, other times it's fields of mushrooms. Get strimming!

a complex, freeform, emergent, ultra-dynamic, hyper-kinetic, simultaneous-two-player arena-based shooter paraded as a hilarious smorgasbord-pastiche of classic silver screen Hollywood horror tropes. At the time it was nostalgic on a thematic level, today the multi-layers of pixelated reminiscence peel away like skin on the zombies being fought.

If any one auteur can be attributed to this masterpiece it would be Mike Ebert – chief designer, map maker and contributing artist – who had previously worked on the art for *Maniac Mansion*, *Monkey Island*, *Super Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*. Such artistic pedigree is immediately apparent when seeing how beautifully the game recreates many beloved horror classics, both old and new. From the usual Universal Classic Monsters of vampires, Frankenstein's monster, mummies, gillmen and werewolves, to modern fare like chainsaw maniacs and evil dolls. The teenage heroes meanwhile evoke the youthful tone of Eighties films like *The Monster Squad*. Look over the screens across these pages and note just how much love went into satirising the cinematic inhabitants of *ZAMN*.

Again, it was the perfect time for Mike and his talented team. They were all of an age where they would have watched classic creature features in early childhood and developed a fondness for them, subsequently living through the Eighties and experiencing both the remakes and the surge in new horror films thanks ▶

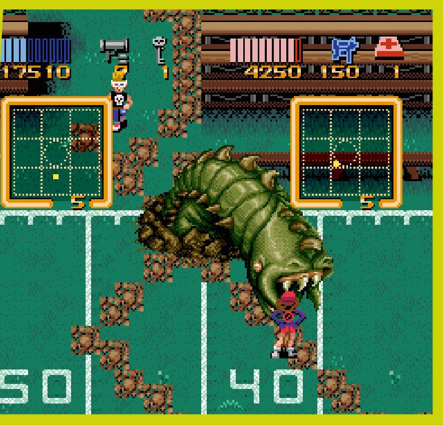
CONVERSION CAPERS

WHICH VERSION IS BEST?

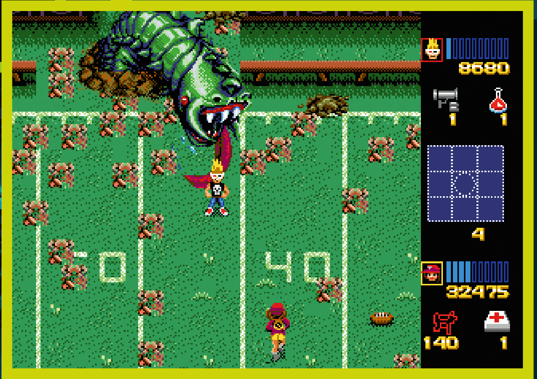
SNES

ZOMBIES
55
SUPER NINTENDO
PAL VERSION
Nintendo

The lead platform which development started on, the SNES version has all the usual benefits over its Mega Drive rival, such as a nicer manual and higher colour palette. There's also an exclusive obscenely difficult to find one-off secret weapon: the flamethrower. Being on a Nintendo platform it's been defanged, with the blood-red game over screen changed to purple, and severed heads in the ending stage changed to puppet dolls. It's a fantastic release, but we prefer the Sega version because…

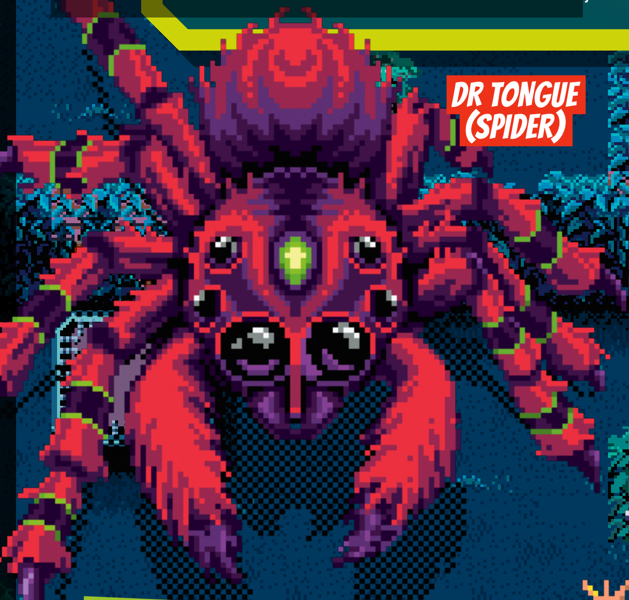


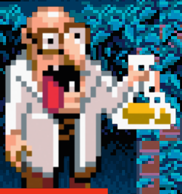
MEGA DRIVE

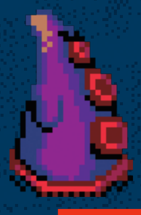


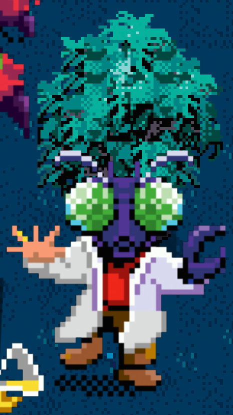
ZOMBIES
MEGA DRIVE
16-BIT CARTRIDGE

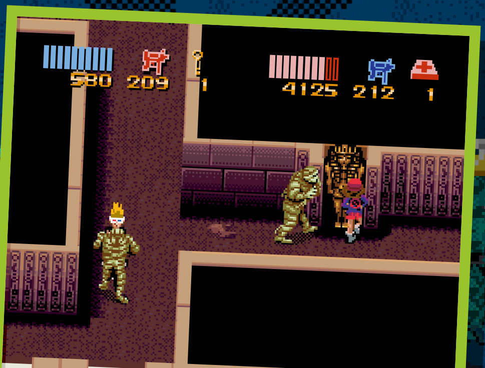
…this superior release benefits from a higher resolution! The SNES version is 256 pixels wide, whereas the MD port increases this by 25% to 320 pixels. Some YouTubers incorrectly claim the MD version has a reduced play area, but for both versions it's still only 256 pixels across. On MD those extra 64 pixels are reserved for a dedicated HUD and radar, allowing for better viewing and strategy during hectic levels – just look at how less cluttered it is!


DR TONGUE (SPIDER)


DR TONGUE (HUMAN)

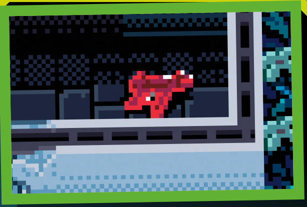

PURPLE TENTACLE


THE ELUSIVE SON OF DR TONGUE



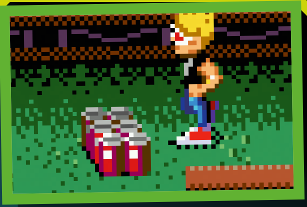
MONSTER MASHING

THE TOOLS TO DEFEAT ZOMBIES' DENIZENS



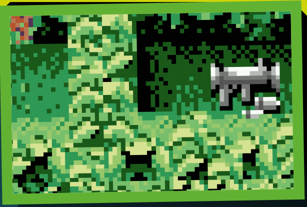
SQUIRT GUN

Basic rapid-fire starting weapon and a decent workhorse for the entire game, though some enemies like giant spiders need a lot of hits. Ammo limit is 999; if it runs out it does not recharge!



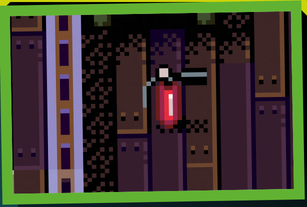
SODA POP CANS

Crowd control weapon which is thrown like a grenade, exploding in a shower of soda. Difficult to aim and low damage limit its usefulness (good for dolls though). Hold down fire to lob them quickly.



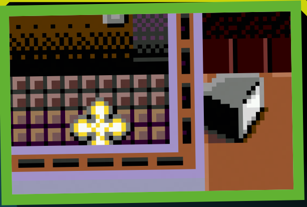
BAZOOKA

The most important weapon by virtue of it blowing open doors and blasting holes in hedges! The massively high damage would make it useful for tough enemies, but the recoil negates rapid firing.



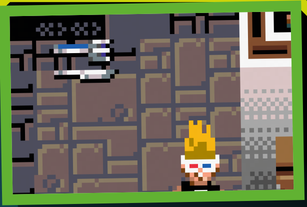
FIRE EXTINGUISHER

An icy-cold defensive weapon. Great for killing blob monsters; on anything else it just freezes enemies in place, which can also be extremely useful (especially on dolls and chainsaw maniacs).



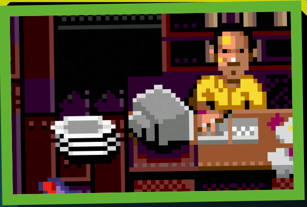
ANCIENT ARTEFACT

The manual describes it as a talisman, but it's a crucifix. Holding fire creates a force field which protects you from damage while also harming enemies. Naturally, it's the best against vampires.



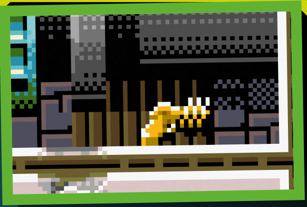
SILVERWARE

A fairly scarce weapon found in earlier levels, the silverware does very little damage. Except to werewolves which it obviously kills in one hit! So save them for taking out the werewolves.



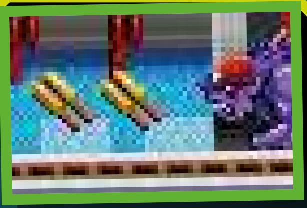
PLATES

A mid-tier weapon which the manual dismisses as being not much use. Except they're surprisingly effective against snakeoids! Pair them with decoys to make life a bit easier.



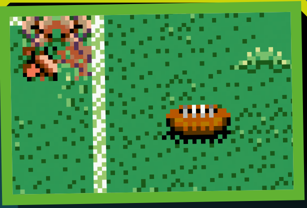
MARTIAN BUBBLE GUN

These are the same weapons the martians use. Not hugely useful except on giant ants, which it destroys in a single hit! If the level has martians make sure to stockpile.



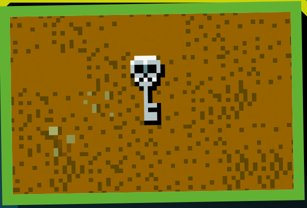
ICE POPS

This has a throwing arc similar to the soda pop and tomatoes, making it tricky to aim. It can kill the blob monsters, but we prefer equipping the fire extinguisher for ease of use.



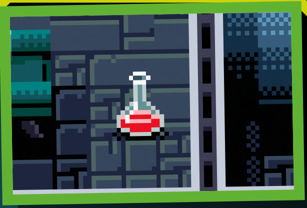
FOOTBALL

Extremely rare and the most useless weapon. Only effective against the American footballer enemies on levels 12 and 47. Throwing plenty of them at the footballers gets bonus points.



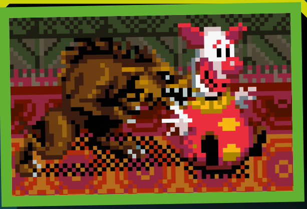
KEY/SKELETON KEY

Keys open generic doors, but skeleton keys open skull doors, which are often mandatory to progress. Some can be skipped, however, allowing you to save skull keys between levels.



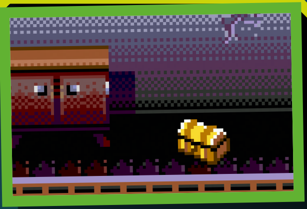
POTIONS

The red potion turns you into a monster with a powerful punch attack; the blue ones make you invulnerable and allows water walking; the yellow question mark potion has a random effect.



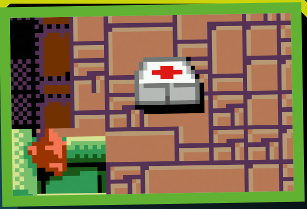
DECOYS

Cherish these laughing clowns. You'd think a purely defensive item which distracts enemies wouldn't be amazing, but they are! Keeps monsters away from you and victims.



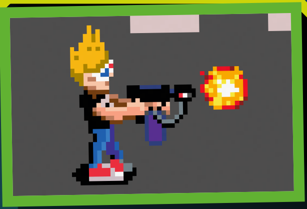
PANDORA'S BOX

A bit like the Ark Of The Covenant in *Indiana Jones*, opening this causes a golden energy to swirl around the screen destroying everything it touches. Massively useful!



FIRST AID KIT

Restores energy to maximum. Do you know, the Red Cross dislikes it when any media use their logo to represent medicine? And yet here we have it: the Red Cross logo in all its glory.



FLAMETHROWER

Hidden weapon only on the SNES: bring a spare skeleton key from level 16 to level 22; once through the skull door look for an invisible wall passage – it's hidden behind the scenery.

CHEERLEADER

WEED-EATER

In levels with mutant plants and lots of weeds this is the only solution, so always make sure you have spare ammo. Also good against zombies, mushroom men, and – surprisingly – vampires too!

TOMATOES

The manual describes these as being less useful than even plates, but claims the martians hate them. Honestly, martians go down quick with the squirt gun, so we never really used these.

SPEED SHOES

The manual calls these the “T.K. (Transylvania Knights) 3000 Cross-Trainers” and says they’re great for sprinting round the ’hood. Basically they just make you run really, really fast.

INNER-TUBER

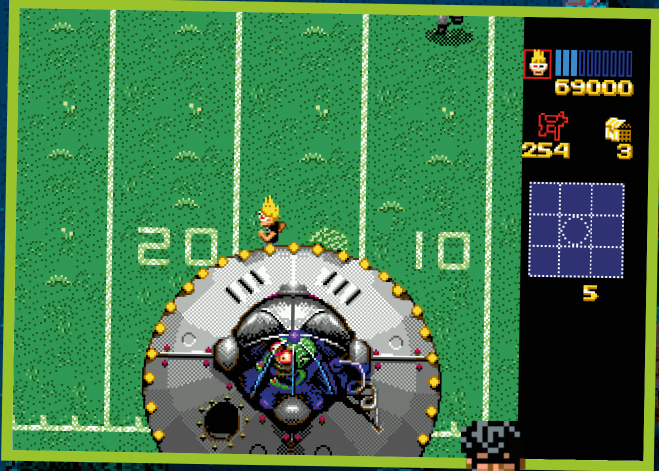
to video tapes. Like bodysnatching spores from space, the progenitors for *ZAMN* had travelled pretty far.

Its influences though are not always easy to pinpoint. After a few hours of play it would be tempting to claim Eugene Jarvis as the spiritual godfather for *ZAMN*. The mazes within enclosed arenas, the goal of rescuing victims (as the manual calls them), all while fighting hoards of monstrous enemies, everything seems like a natural, logical evolution of *Robotron: 2084*, *Smash TV* and *Total Carnage*. For some it will also be reminiscent of *Gauntlet*. Regardless, it feels exactly like an early Eugene Jarvis game. There’s a freeform flow to events which generate novel emergent scenarios. Just look at the hedge-maze levels, where chainsaw maniacs react to player presence, cutting new paths through the maze, possibly being kited by players, altering one’s spatial access and encouraging spontaneous tactics as enemies and victims risk colliding unless players intervene.

Yet over the years, in interviews, Mike has revealed that while he and his team were cognisant of *Smash TV*, even at one point considering a similar style of control scheme, it was not the primary or even the main influence. The DNA of the game’s qualia (the conscious experience it attempts to create), apart from Hollywood films, is actually from an obscure 1986 Japanese arcade game by Alpha Denshi Kougyou, better known as ADK. Although famous on the Neo Geo for later games like *Magician Lord*, *World Heroes* and *Twinkle Star Sprites*, it was the company’s 1986 arcade overhead-brawler *Kyros* that directly shaped *ZAMN*. If you owned an Atari ST, C64, ZX Spectrum, or Amstrad, you might recognise its home conversion, *Desolator*.

Upon comparison, Mike’s muse becomes obvious: the foliage lined walls, resplendent greenery everywhere, doors popping ajar to allow progress, the mystical and bizarre opponents, and vast tracts of water. So many visual aspects of *ZAMN* seem to take its cue from *Kyros*. Which is not to say that LucasArts’ game was derivative, because it innovated tremendously. It brought interactive environments, where curtains, cupboards, chests, pots, even kitchen sinks could be examined for power-ups, of which there are over 20 available. There are equally as many enemies (see boxout – we cut some for space), spread over 48 normal levels and seven bonus levels.

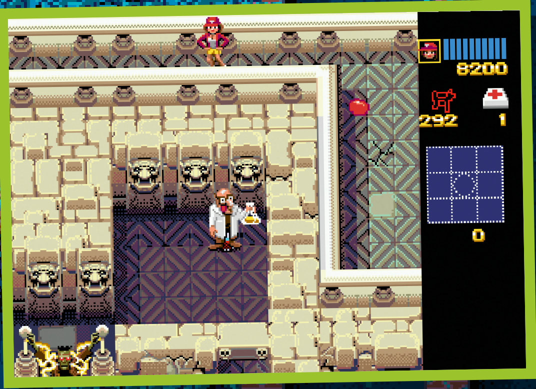
Truly there is a plethora of content and, with enemies and weapons interacting distinctly, a myriad of ways for each game to play out. As stated each level’s goal is to rescue victims, of which you start with ten. But if an enemy reaches a victim first, the number permanently decreases. If the number of victims is reduced to zero it’s game over. But to finish a level



» [Mega Drive] Some prefer the SNES colour palette, but actually the MD game is more vibrant, like with these saucer aliens.

GEORGE LUCAS

» [Mega Drive] This is the depraved Dr Tongue. You can’t reach him just yet, so he taunts you.



FOOTBALL PLAYER

FLYING SAUCER

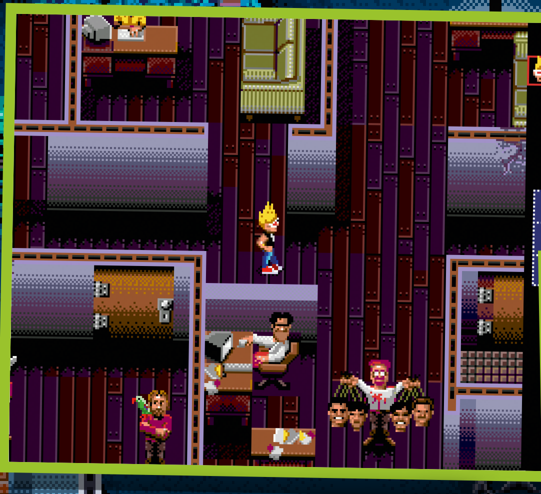
EVIL SCHOOL TEACHER

you only need to save the remaining number. Meaning there is a tightly honed balance between spending resources to save victims, for bonus points and to provide a safety net for later levels, or stockpiling power-ups for the final showdown. It actually gets easier to finish levels the more victims die!

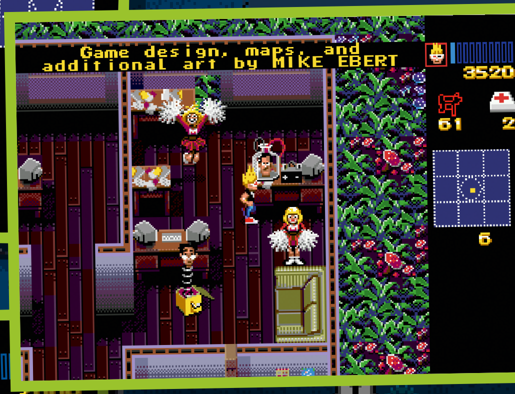
The team had wanted battery back-up, to record all the accumulated weapons and completed levels, but this was too expensive; while a password recording all this would have been too long and complex. Instead a four-letter password is given out every four levels, keeping track only of level and surviving victims. Sadly it does not keep track of equipment. The problem is that later levels (level 36 and beyond) become excessively difficult if starting with basic gear; conversely, playing from the start and hoarding items makes things much, much easier. However you approach *ZAMN*, it's a slow bleed of attrition as levels accumulate while power-ups and victims dwindle. Repeatedly you'll need to make a choice on whether to expend a key to unlock a door or burn ammo blowing it open; activate a Pandora's box or let a victim die; use resources or waste lives. Every success and its costs need evaluating because, come the final boss in level 48, a Pyrrhic victory actually means death.

In its released form, the conflation of a trillion different creative neutrons, *ZAMN* was fun, challenging, and though not initially mega-successful, ultimately influential and widely regarded as timeless. It found an official sequel in *Ghoul Patrol* on SNES (1994); a spiritual successor in *Herc's Adventures* on PlayStation and Saturn (1997); directly inspired games by other developers, such as *Swagman* (1997); drew comparisons by reviewers on *Dead Rising* (2006) and *Monster Madness* (2007); saw a Virtual Console re-release on Wii (2009); and around 2011 was allegedly even considered for film adaptation.

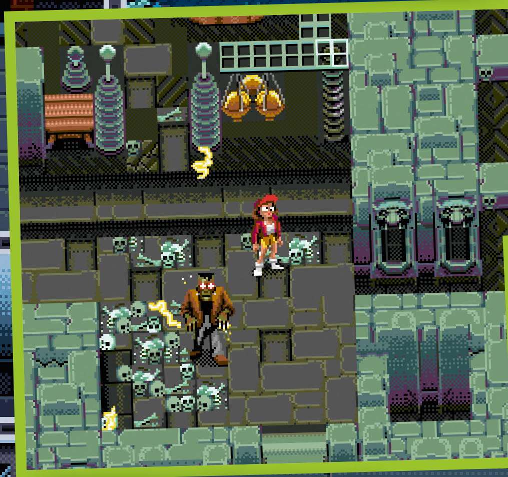
It's now nearly 20 years after the release of *ZAMN* and, while that brief magical ecosystem of creativity will never exist in quite the same way again, we have two sublime iterations of something which even time cannot take from us. In fact, age only seems to improve it.



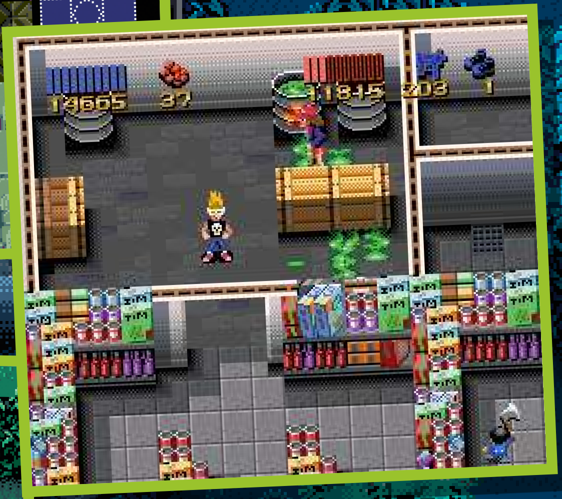
» [Mega Drive] See those severed heads, bottom right? In the Nintendo version they were censored to look like puppets.



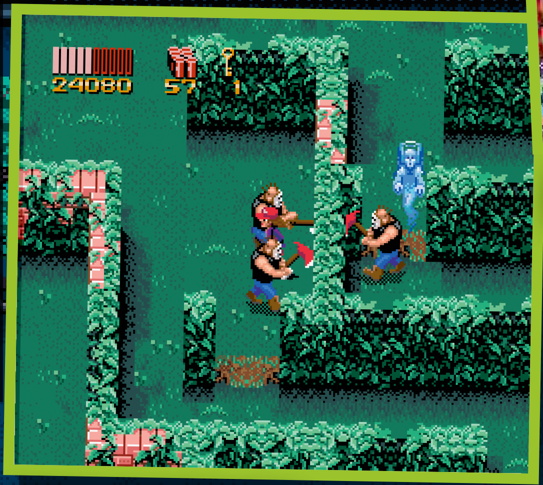
» [Mega Drive] The bonus ending level put you in the LucasArts offices. You can say hello to George Lucas.



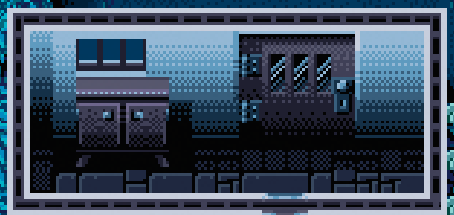
» [Mega Drive] The depths of Dr Tongue's dungeon. Oddly, there are no indoor swings… don't ask us what that means.



» [SNES] The level of background detail throughout is fantastic – especially in the shopping mall levels.



» [SNES] Julie has just been killed by axe maniacs, which replaced the chainsaw maniacs in PAL releases.

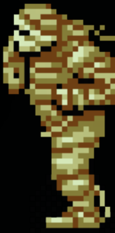


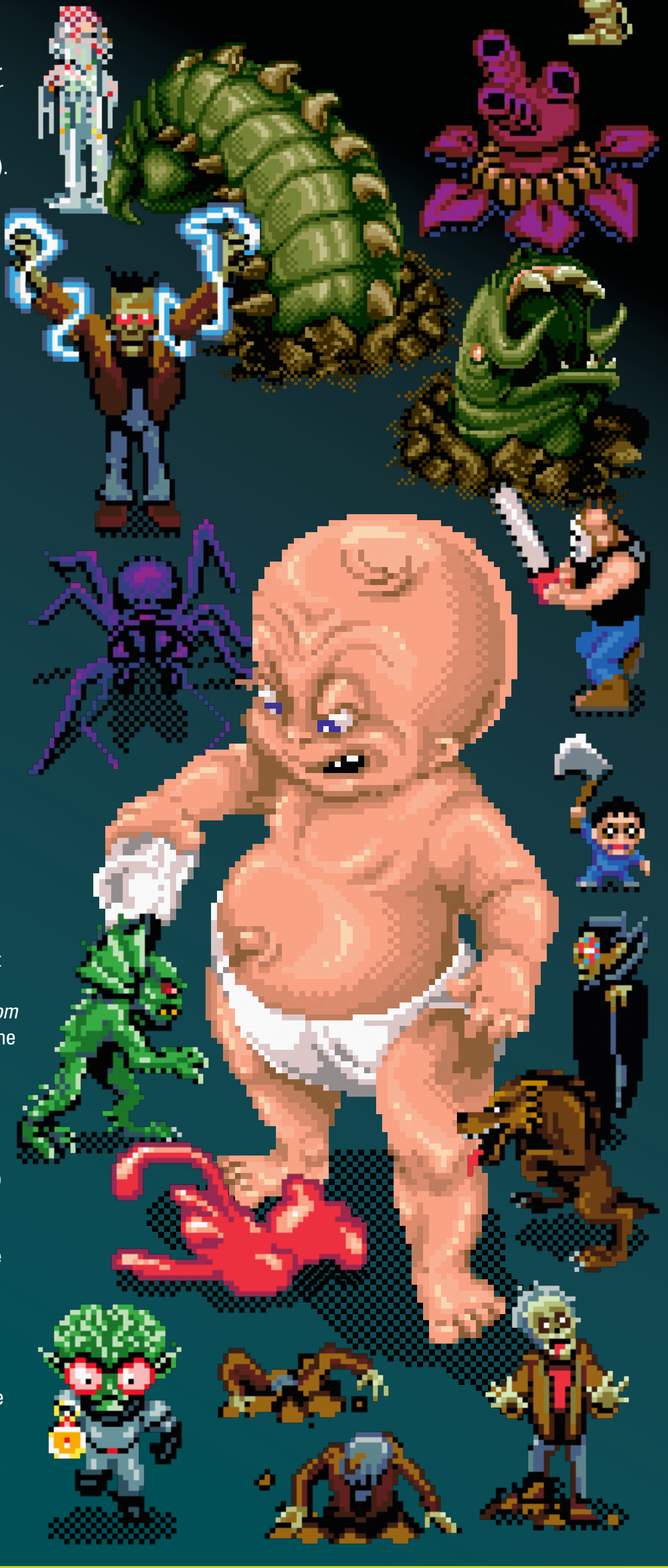
TRAMPOLINE GIRL

BARBECUE GUY

MATINEE MONSTERS

WHICH FILM ICONS ARE ZOMBIES' CREATURES BASED ON?





DOPPELGANGER

■ A plant-like pod releases a clone of the player. Not too dangerous and easy to kill. In two-player mode, with a lot of them, there might be some confusion. Inspiration: *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers* film from 1956 (itself based on a book).

FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER

■ Big, lumbering monster brought to life by electricity. As you'd expect it dishes out and takes a lot of damage, but it's slow so can easily be avoided. Inspiration: Likely the 1931 film, *Frankenstein*, itself based on Mary Shelley's 1818 novel.

GIANT ANT

■ Constantly spawning, these are fast and difficult to avoid. Only ever use the bubble gun, which takes them out in one shot. Inspiration: The 1954 film about irradiated ants, *Them!* However, that film inspired so many other creations, it could also be those.

GIANT BABY

■ If you're getting crushed, soda can be lobbed from inside buildings – but it then shoots milk at you. After defeat it can be rescued. Inspiration: Possibly the 1957 movie, *The Amazing Colossal Man*, which led to *Attack Of The 50 Foot Woman* and some remakes.

GILLMAN OF THE BLUE LAGOON (AKA BROOK SHARDS)

■ Hateful enemies that follow you relentlessly, leap over scenery and always target victims just before you can rescue them. A ghost potion for water walking is handy! Inspiration: *Creature From The Black Lagoon* (1954), though the manual name lampoons Brooke Shields in *The Blue Lagoon*.

JELLY BLOB

■ Slow and awkward moving, these are only dangerous when flinging mini-blobs – clinging to your head preventing weapon or item use. Can only be destroyed with cold, so stock ice pops or fire extinguishers. Inspiration: *The Blob* movie from 1958, later remade in 1988.

MARTIAN

■ The classic big-headed green-skinned alien. They're fast, but go down easily and their bubble attacks are more annoying than deadly. Watch out for the giant flying saucer that accompanies them. Inspiration: Too many to pinpoint, possibly *Invaders From Mars* (1953), and maybe even the *Mars Attacks* trading cards.

MUMMY

■ Slow, shuffling piles of rags that spawn from sarcophagi in the walls. They take a fair amount of damage, but firing the squirt gun from a distance should keep you safe. Inspiration: *The Mummy* from 1931, part of the *Universal Monsters* umbrella, was later re-imagined repeatedly.

POD PLANT

■ The manual calls this the pod plant, not to be confused with the plant-like pods from the doppelganger enemy. They're immobile and easily avoided, but send weeds out across the map. Sometimes they hide power-ups. Inspiration: Difficult to say, maybe *The Day Of The Triffids*?

SNAKEOID

■ One of the toughest enemies due to its erratic movement. Use decoys to focus their attention then fire plates or bazookas. Hitting the lower neck registers a hit, but seemingly does no damage – shoot the mouth! Drops skeleton keys. Inspiration: The graboids from *Tremors* (1990).

STANLEY DECKER, THE CHAINSAW MANIAC

■ Extremely tough to kill. Decoys distract them well and the fire extinguisher freezes them. Try to lure them into clearing paths through the hedge mazes. Inspiration: A blend of Leatherface from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and Jason Voorhees from *Friday The 13th*.

TOMMY THE EVIL DOLL

■ Difficult to hit due to their size (use soda). Just when you think they're dead they immolate and chase you. Being small makes them easier to avoid, but crowds are deadly. Inspiration: *Child's Play* (1988), though evil doll films date back to the 1930s.

VLAD BELMONT THE VAMPIRE

■ Flies around in bat form, very difficult to kill; if you have the ammo use the artefact, otherwise a weed-eater also slowly works. Given *ZAMN* was published by Konami, the name is apt. Inspiration: Given its appearance, most likely *Dracula* (1931) rather than *Nosferatu* (1922).

WEREWOLF

■ Fast and able to leap over walls, so you (and victims) are never safe. They take many hits, though silverware one-hit kills them. In levels that turn to night, tourists will transform into werewolves! Inspiration: Possibly *The Wolf Man* (1941), but there are many such films.

ZOMBIE

■ The most common enemy, found in almost every level. They die with just one hit from the squirt gun. They can kill victims, so don't get complacent. Inspiration: It's tempting to cite *Night Of The Living Dead* (1968), but actually zombie films date back to the Thirties.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Damocles: Mercenary II

» **PLATFORM:** ATARI ST (FEATURED), AMIGA, WINDOWS (UPDATED)
» **RELEASED:** 1990 » **DEVELOPER:** PAUL WOAKES (NOVAGEN SOFTWARE)

Flipping through these pages you may feel the Atari ST doesn't get enough coverage compared to consoles. And in fairness, there are many console owners who never experienced computers. But don't feel dismayed. Instead, imagine a console owner's thought process if you had described *Damocles* to them in the Nineties.

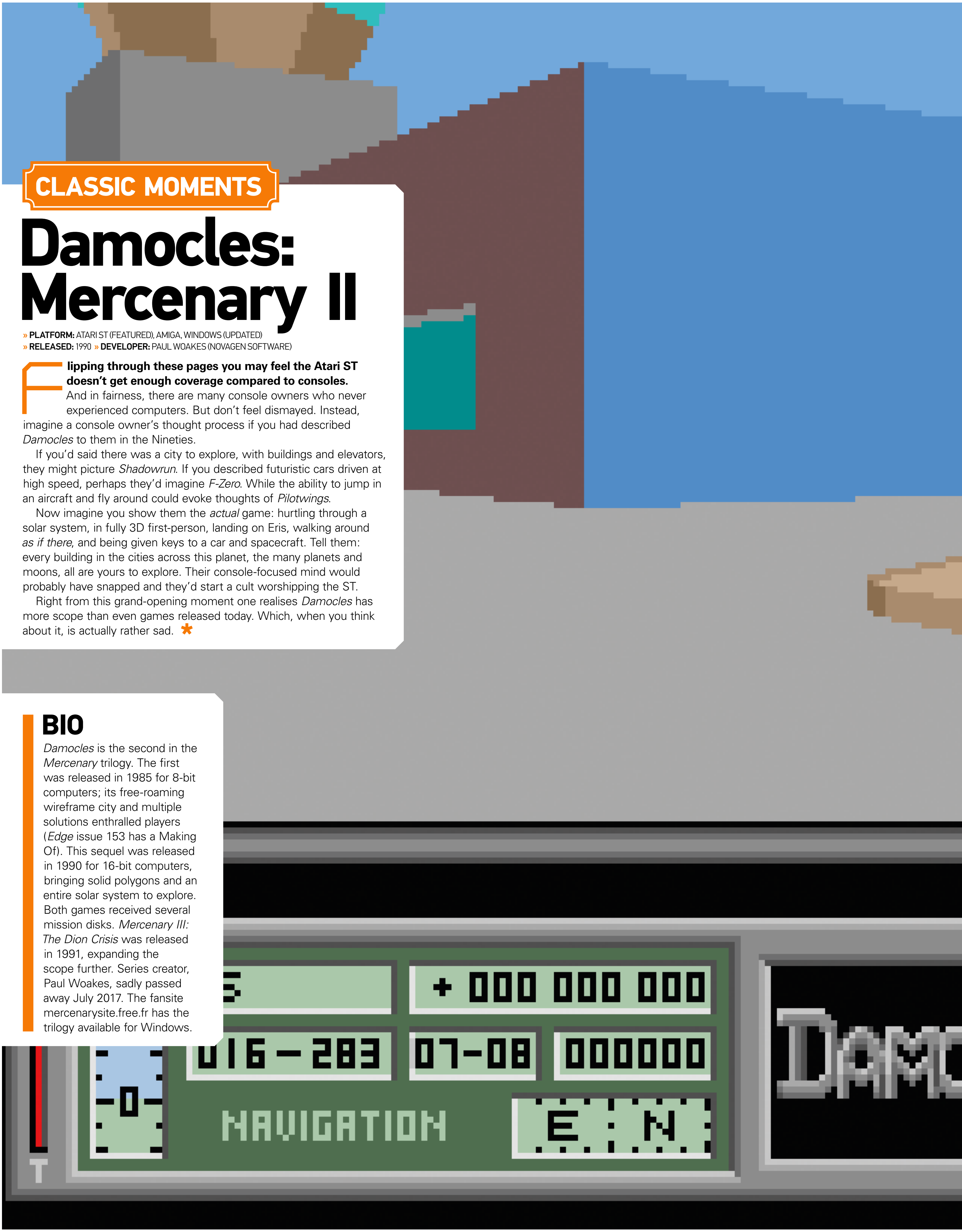
If you'd said there was a city to explore, with buildings and elevators, they might picture *Shadowrun*. If you described futuristic cars driven at high speed, perhaps they'd imagine *F-Zero*. While the ability to jump in an aircraft and fly around could evoke thoughts of *Pilotwings*.

Now imagine you show them the *actual* game: hurtling through a solar system, in fully 3D first-person, landing on Eris, walking around *as if there*, and being given keys to a car and spacecraft. Tell them: every building in the cities across this planet, the many planets and moons, all are yours to explore. Their console-focused mind would probably have snapped and they'd start a cult worshipping the ST.

Right from this grand-opening moment one realises *Damocles* has more scope than even games released today. Which, when you think about it, is actually rather sad. *

BIO

Damocles is the second in the *Mercenary* trilogy. The first was released in 1985 for 8-bit computers; its free-roaming wireframe city and multiple solutions enthralled players (*Edge* issue 153 has a Making Of). This sequel was released in 1990 for 16-bit computers, bringing solid polygons and an entire solar system to explore. Both games received several mission disks. *Mercenary III: The Dion Crisis* was released in 1991, expanding the scope further. Series creator, Paul Woakes, sadly passed away July 2017. The fansite mercenarysite.free.fr has the trilogy available for Windows.



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MORE CLASSIC DAMOCLES: MERCENARY II MOMENTS

Squeeze the president

This doesn't do much, but you can squeeze the state president for more money at the start. Your offer for saving the planet starts at 10 million ECU, going up to 15, and then "positively my last offer" is given as 20. But you can hold out for 25 million. It's only fair given the committee wasted 30 years not finding a solution!

Feeling small

Sure, you've flown around the cities and the islands on the starting planet of Eris a bit, and you've looked at the two solar charts that come boxed with the game, and you think you've got a good idea of how gargantuan the game world is. But you really don't. Not until you've left the surface, felt the cold enormity of space, and touched down upon a lonely moon to realise – only then – how insignificantly small you truly are.

Wait, I can die?!

"YOU CAN SURVIVE FOR TEN SECONDS!" Considering the manual explicitly says you cannot die, and up to this point the game has felt very safe, the first time you step onto a hostile planet without protection it's less a Classic and more a Brown Alert Moment! Obviously you wouldn't leave your spacecraft on an airless planet without a suit – but one time we stepped through a transporter which plonked us on a frozen world!

Stealing from Paul

A fun self-insert by the game's author, Paul Woakes. Get your spacecraft, fly to 09-02 on Eris and grab the anti-grav. Then over to 11-08, pick up your craft, and use transporter #5 to reach Gaea. Fly to 04-13 and grab Key-A on floor 2. Return to 08-08, pick up your ship, and use the transporter to visit Dion. Fly to 14-13, break into Paul's house, and steal his computer! Once you have it, fool around and see what happens.

THE MAKING OF

WIZKID

WIZKID IS SENSIBLE SOFTWARE'S EXPERIMENTAL JAZZ RECORD: A CRAZY, OUT-THERE, ONE-HOUR WURLITZER SOLO SANDWICHED BETWEEN THE MAINSTREAM POP HITS MEGA-LO-MANIA AND SENSIBLE SOCCER. SO HOW DID SOMETHING THIS STRANGE EVER GET MADE?

WORDS BY LEWIS PACKWOOD

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN SOFTWARE

» **DEVELOPER:** SENSIBLE SOFTWARE

» **RELEASED:** 1992

» **PLATFORM:** AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC

» **GENRE:** PUZZLE

Wizkid **was a bizarre game, even by Sensible Software's standards.** As just a couple of examples of its weirdness, the titular protagonist gets trapped in a toilet maze at one point (see The Toilet Mystery) and meets a digitised woman who barks like a dog (see Whatever Happened to Dog Girl?). For Sensible Software cofounder Jon Hare, the game was like an experimental b-side slotted between mainstream hits, "We would do sensible games like *Microprose Soccer, Sensible Soccer, Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* – these are pretty sensible, straightforward ideas. And then we would intersperse it with more off-the-wall, left-field stuff like *Wizball* and *Parallax*. And *Wizkid* was totally off-the-wall. Every time we did that, it was kind of expressing a different side to ourselves, you can call it jazz music, I guess."

Jon and his old schoolmate Chris Yates – the original Sensible Software duo – had a history of noodling around with experimental tunes. "We've been writing music and stuff together since we were 15," says Jon. "We were in a band together for about three years before we even started making games." In their early years the band played fairly traditional prog rock – but once the drummer left, Jon and Chris took the chance to embrace their inner strangeness. "The next gig we did was, like, really off-the-wall. We were both wearing dressing gowns and rubber masks, and doing this really weird music. And if you look at some of our cover disks, if you look at some of our budget games, we had this taste for quirkiness that went right back to our musical performances." Chris and Jon had created a slew of games for home computers throughout the Eighties, including the wonderful *Wizball* (see **Retro Gamer** issue 215 for the evolution of that game). But Jon can't remember exactly what made Sensible decide to create a sequel to this oddball shoot-'em-up. He suggests it could even have been the suggestion of Ocean, the game's publisher. "It might have been Gary Bracey basically encouraging us to do something. Gary was a producer there, and he was extremely supportive of us. I mean, he was properly looking after us and backing us up as a creative force to the people inside Ocean."

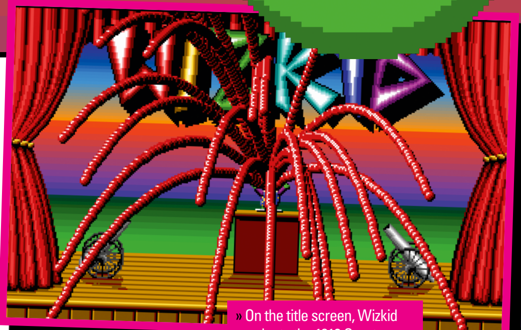
Jon admits it's not every day that a publisher lets a developer get away with releasing something as strange as *Wizkid*. "We were lucky, I guess we had a reputation for being good. And in general people trusted us to do a good job and didn't make us justify ourselves. Most great art comes from artists being pretty much allowed freedom – with constant self-editing as you go."

It helped that the game was released on the Amiga, before consoles came to dominate with their more proscriptive regulations. "The Amiga was the best machine in my opinion," says Jon. "It was a massive jump up from the 8-bit machines that came before it, and it was totally free from platform holders telling you what to do and vetting things. You could do whatever you wanted, basically, and in that era, all of the outlets were very open to new ideas. We were just doing what the fuck we wanted."

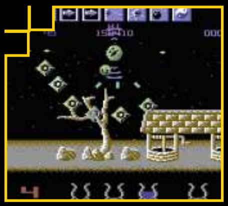
Wizkid ended up being sandwiched between the genre-defining *Mega-Lo-Mania* (1991) and mega-hit *Sensible Soccer* (1992). By this point, Sensible

» Jon Hare sold Sensible Software in 1999, and now he runs Tower Studios.

» Sensible Software circa 1992. Top row, from left to right: Chris Yates, Chris Chapman, Jon Hare. Bottom row: Richard Joseph, Dave 'Ubik' Korn.



» On the title screen, Wizkid conducts the 1812 Overture, complete with its famous cannon shots. Then at the final crescendo, his head explodes. "It sets a feeling for the game coming," says Jon.

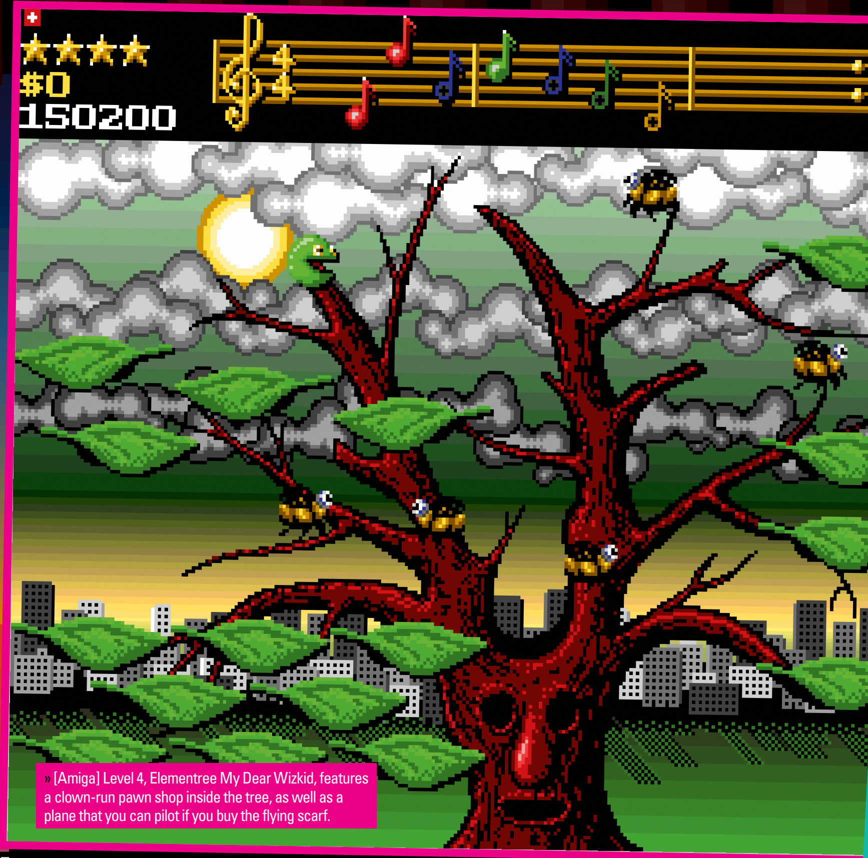


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

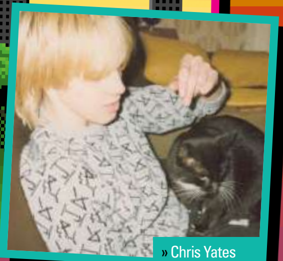
WIZBALL (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: C64, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1987

CANNON FODDER
SYSTEM: AMIGA, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1993

SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER
SYSTEM: AMIGA, PC
YEAR: 1993



» [Amiga] Level 4, Elementree My Dear Wizkid, features a clown-run pawn shop inside the tree, as well as a plane that you can pilot if you buy the flying scarf.



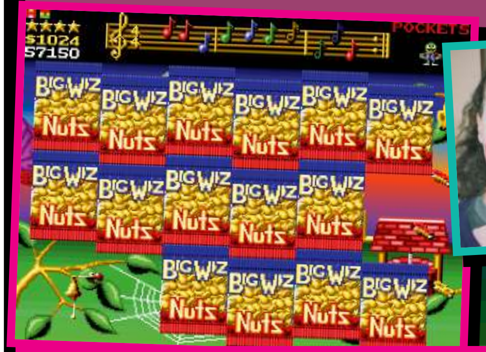
» Chris Yates and the real-life Nifta the cat.

Software had grown to around six people, and Jon had developed *Mega-Lo-Mania* with Chris Chapman. But *Wizkid* saw the old band getting back together. "*Wizkid* was the last game that myself and Chris [Yates] did together as a pair," says Jon. "All of the early Commodore 64 stuff was me and Chris, and *Wizkid* is the final expression of us just doing what the hell we want with no rules."

Chris and Jon wrote their first C64 games in Chris' dad's spare bedroom, complete with *Flintstones* wallpaper, but by the time they were working on *Wizkid*, they had moved on to the more business-like surrounds of Sensible's offices in March, Cambridgeshire. Nevertheless, they retained their schoolboy anarchic humour, which permeates every facet of the game – and in many ways *Wizkid* is the embodiment of a very old and very close friendship. The game's development was intuitive, with the pair pinging ideas back and forth gleefully, knowing that the other would understand. It's the kind of ease that comes from an intimate long-term collaboration, says Jon, "You don't have to think too much."

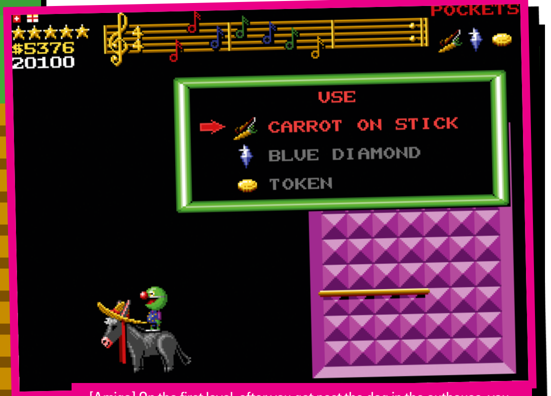
Wizkid is a direct sequel to *Wizball* (1987), but the game itself is remarkably different. Whereas *Wizball* was essentially a shoot-'em-up, *Wizkid* is almost two separate games in one, combining puzzle-like brick-juggling sections with a *Dizzy*-style adventure. "We started off with the *Arkanoid* brick bashing, I think," says Jon. "And we thought 'Yeah, this is alright. Now how can we make it a Sensible game and put something more into it? It could be one of our budget games with just the head bashing bit, so how can we turn it into a full game?'"

The solution was to add a detachable body and send *Wizkid* on the craziest adventure they could imagine. "We just decided he'd grow a body," says Jon. "Because he couldn't have a body while he was bashing bricks, so it needed to be separate. And once we'd done that first level, where he rings the bell and the toilet comes down, once we'd ▶



» [Amiga] The blocks that you juggle throughout the game take on a variety of shapes, from simple *Arkanoid*-style rectangles to peanut packets and TVs.

» Jon Hare used this photo of his mate Iain as a model for Iain the Clown on level 4 of *Wizkid*.



» [Amiga] On the first level, after you get past the dog in the outhouse, you reach this purple room. Press the hidden button to summon a donkey, then control it with a carrot on a stick. Naturally.

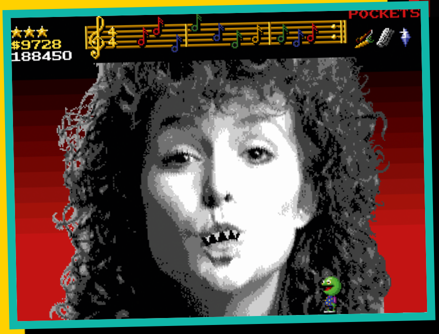
WHATEVER HAPPENED TO DOG GIRL?

THE PUZZLE OF THE LADY CANINE EXPLAINED

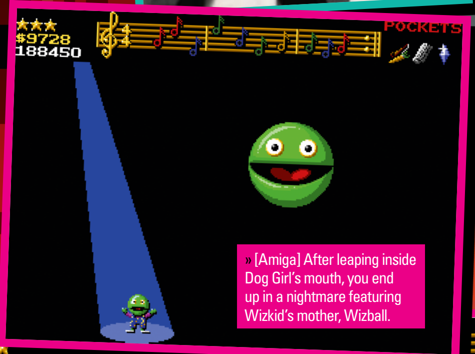
Out of all the many weird things that happen in *Wizkid*, Dog Girl is possibly the weirdest. As our hero reaches level 8, he's confronted by a giant black-and-white photo of a woman. In the background, the tune *How Much Is That Doggie In The Window?* plays, and every now and then the woman will bark along to it, revealing pointed teeth.

If you time your jump carefully, Wizkid can leap into her open jaws, at which point he's transported into a nightmare featuring his mother, Wizball, before waking up in his bed. But who is Dog Girl? Jon Hare explains, "We wanted this thing opening and shutting that you could jump in. And then we turned it into a mouth. And then one of the guys, who was actually our producer on *Cannon Fodder*, was around the office and he was a friend with Stoo [Cambridge], who was our artist on *Cannon Fodder*. And Stoo for some reason had a photo of this guy's cousin – and his cousin turned into Dog Girl. And then we added the dog teeth and *How Much Is That Doggie In The Window?* as the theme tune!"

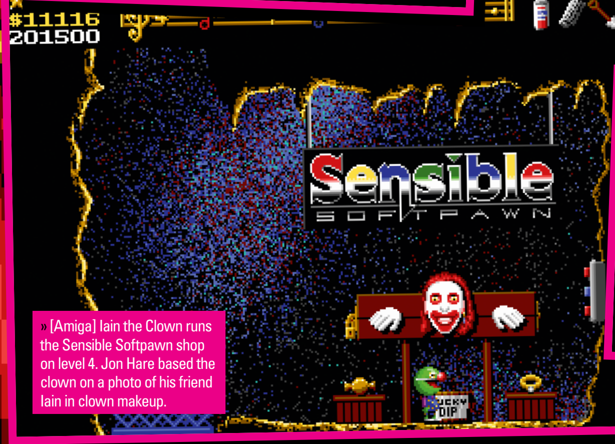
And did the cousin ever find out she'd been turned into Dog Girl? "I'm sure he told her… I hope he did. I'm sure Stoo told her, he was the one who butchered her picture!"



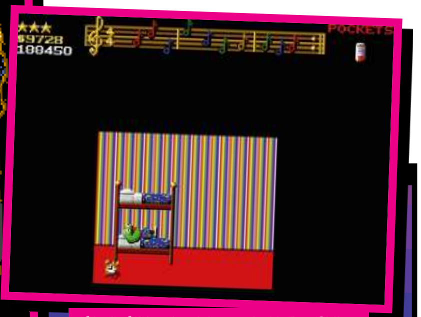
» Jon Hare's daughters Jess and Izzie made this Wizkid doll for him for Father's Day. "He sits on my desk every day," he says.



» [Amiga] After leaping inside Dog Girl's mouth, you end up in a nightmare featuring Wizkid's mother, Wizball.



» [Amiga] Iain the Clown runs the Sensible Softpawn shop on level 4. Jon Hare based the clown on a photo of his friend Iain in clown makeup.

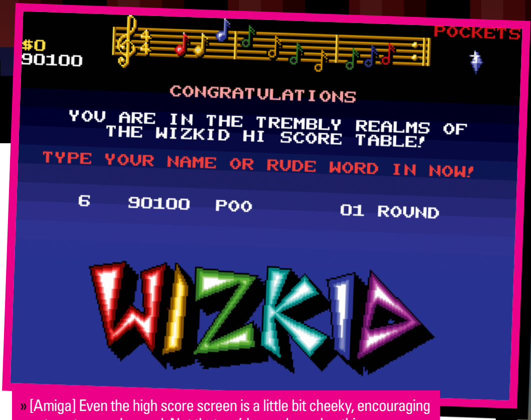


» [Amiga] After the nightmare inside Dog Girl's mouth ends, Wizkid wakes up in his bed. Jump on the bed twice to reveal a yellow diamond.

done that, the rest was all easy. The formula was set: the background image is gonna turn into a run-around action adventure level."

Jon reckons that the story of the game is his favourite part of the whole thing. The idea is that Wizball and the Wizard from the previous game got married and had a kid – Wizkid. "The Wizard lived in Wizball, so there was something going on there," Jon chuckles. At the start of the game, Wizball and Nifta the cat have been kidnapped by Zark the evil mouse, and Wizkid is on a mission to rescue both of them, as well as to rescue Nifta's eight lost kittens. The kittens are the key to winning – it's possible to get to the end without rescuing all of them, but then you're pitted in a rowing race against Zark, and if you don't have all of the kittens manning the oars, you won't beat the mouse to its castle, giving Zark the chance to slam shut the gate.

But if you do manage to find all eight kittens, there's a surprise ending in store, reveals Jon. "Zark says 'I'll tell you what's going on if you can beat my high score at *Wizeroids*', which is basically just *Asteroids* with Wizball heads. So then you get all the coins you've collected in the game, and the more you shove into the *Wizeroids* arcade machine, the more chances you have to beat the high score. If you manage to beat it, Zark the mouse flips around his pointy nose and he turns into the Wizard, who's your father. And he says 'I'm really, really sorry, but I wasn't getting enough attention, and I faked this whole thing. Will you ever forgive me?' To which Wizkid randomly replies 'Yes' or 'No', then the game ends."



CONGRATULATIONS

YOU ARE IN THE TREMBLY REALMS OF THE WIZKID HI SCORE TABLE!

TYPE YOUR NAME OR RUDE WORD IN NOW!

6 90100 POO 01 ROUND

» [Amiga] Even the high score screen is a little bit cheeky, encouraging you to enter a rude word. Not that we'd ever do such a thing.

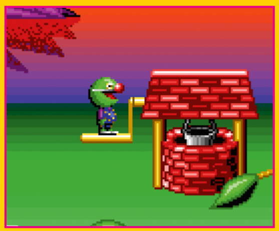
One thing that was retained from *Wizball* to give the game some continuity was the focus on collecting colours. In the brick-bashing sections, Wizkid has to collect differently coloured bubbles to fill the musical notes at the top of the screen. Filling them all triggers what the manual sniggeringly refers to as the 'golden shower'. It's just one example of the enjoyably puerile and entertainingly absurd humour throughout the game, which also sees Wizkid visiting a shop called Sensible Softpawn, run by an eerie clown in the stocks. "The clown's called Iain," notes Jon. "It's because the actual face of that clown is directly modelled on a picture of my friend Iain. One day, for some reason, me and my kids were putting stage makeup on each other's faces, and I made Iain up like a clown, and then took a photo. And then

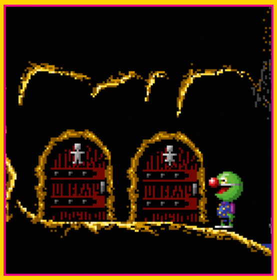
THE TOILET MYSTERY

THE FIRST LEVEL OF WIZKID FEATURES SOME VERY BIZARRE WCS

THE SUSPICIOUS WELL

■ On level 1, once you've completed the golden shower and grabbed your body, headbutt the well handle to turn it. On the first couple of turns, colour bubbles will pop out, but on the third turn, a bucket appears. Jump into it to find out what weirdness lurks below.



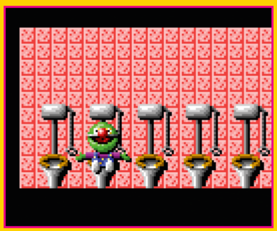


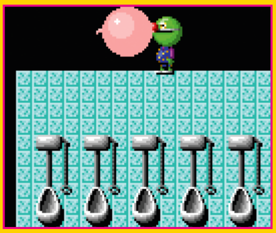
PUBLIC INCONVENIENCES

■ After being lowered to the bottom of the well, you'll discover some inconveniently placed public toilets. It may seem unlikely, but this is par for the course in *Wizkid* – just wait until you meet Iain the Clown.

TROUBLESOME BLOCKAGE

■ If you head inside the ladies', you can approach any of the toilets and tap fire to, ahem, use them. Remember that purple mountain on the first screen? Well, Wizkid's powerful bowels cause the blockage in that volcano to be explosively removed.



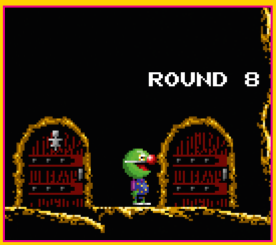


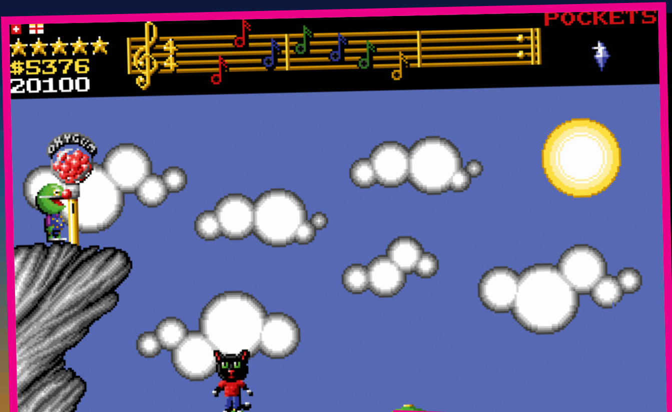
FORBIDDEN BALLOON

■ Head into the men's and you'll see a row of urinals. If you use the broken one, second from the left, the well will flood and you can head back up in the bucket as the water rises. But if you put a token in the condom machine, you can inflate it to float away…

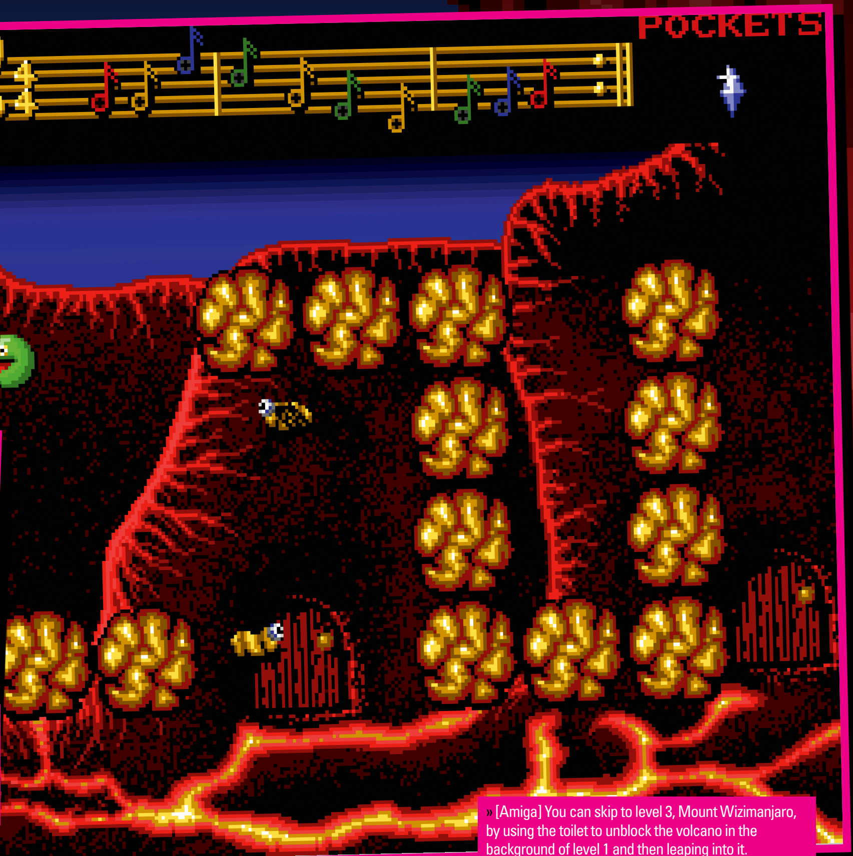
MATHS MAZE

■ …to this secret maths-based maze with 255 hidden rooms. Going into the ladies' doubles the room number: so if you enter room 3, you'll emerge in room 6. The mens' entrance doubles it and adds one. Certain rooms will let you skip to later levels, and you can even find *Wizeroids*.

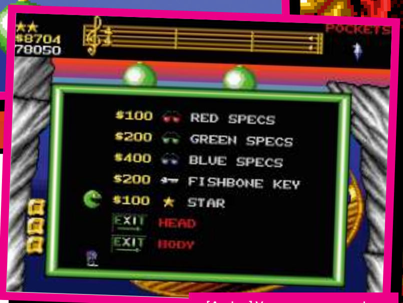




» [Amiga] One of Nifta's eight kittens is hidden on each level. You have to collect them all to get the true ending of the game.



» [Amiga] You can skip to level 3, Mount Wizimanjaro, by using the toilet to unblock the volcano in the background of level 1 and then leaping into it.



$100 RED SPECS
$200 GREEN SPECS
$400 BLUE SPECS
$200 FISHBONE KEY
$100 STAR
EXIT HEAD
EXIT BODY

» [Amiga] You can summon the shop balloon by holding down on the joystick. Some of the goods on sale include a white elephant and a red herring, which, naturally, are utterly useless.

it must have been about a year later when I was like 'Yeah, I know what I can model the clown on, it's that photo!'"

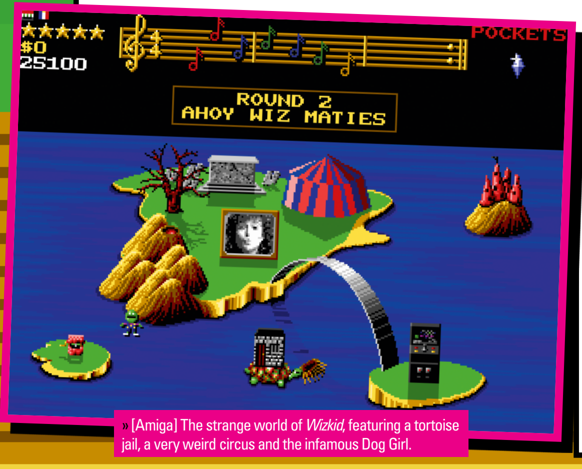
The game just keeps getting weirder the further you go. At one point you have to die so you can turn into a ghost to fight Dracula. And then there's the tortoise jail where you need to get a tin opener to open the back of the unfortunate reptile. Anything goes in *Wizkid*. There's even a random crossword game that pops up if you keep failing on a level, which Jon says they added to keep players from getting bored if they got stuck. "It's like, here's a minigame to play because you're hopeless at the current game," he says.

But perhaps the most memorable moment is on the very first level, which sees you ring a bell that inexplicably causes an outhouse to drop from the sky. "And you open the door, and there's a dog barking," recalls Jon. To get past the canine, you have to buy a newspaper from the shop and post it through the door "and then you open the door, and the dog is sitting on the toilet, reading".

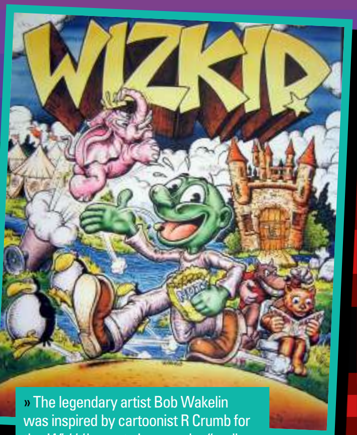
But all this wonderful absurdity meant that *Wizkid* was very much a niche game, with little in the way of financial success. "It was never going to be a massively commercial game because it's too off-the-wall," says Jon. "Compared to *Sensible Soccer* and *Mega-Lo-Mania*, it hardly got noticed. I mean, it got pretty good reviews, but commercially it did nothing. But what is amazing is how well it's stood the test of time. It's still up there as a game that people remember and respect, and that's nice because it's kind of the ultimate expression of me and Chris going freestyle and doing whatever we want. And it's really, really gratifying that people still love and respect the work we did all these years later."

So would Jon ever consider revisiting this cult classic? Is there a possibility of a sequel to *Wizkid*? "I don't really know," says Jon, giving the question a moment's thought. "I think it was about me and Chris working together," he continues, "and I think that's not really happening any more. So no, I don't think it would be appropriate." He adds that he hasn't met up with Chris Yates for over ten years.

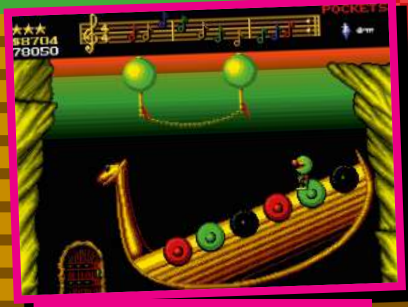
But one sequel is on his radar. "The Sensible game I would like to look at doing a bit more with is *Mega-Lo-Mania*," he says. "It was the one that, timing wise, suffered the most, because it was a very early god game, and it was doing really, really well, but unfortunately it was with Mirrorsoft at the wrong time," he laments, noting that Robert Maxwell's untimely demise essentially killed the game. "So that game particularly is one that hasn't had enough attention for the quality of the game. And it's got enough there that you can you could modernise it, you could make it a great online game." *



» [Amiga] The strange world of *Wizkid*, featuring a tortoise jail, a very weird circus and the infamous Dog Girl.



» The legendary artist Bob Wakelin was inspired by cartoonist R Crumb for the *Wizkid* box art. Jon says he "really likes" the art, but worried at the time that Wizkid "looks like a teenager" when he's actually meant to be a toddler.



» [Amiga] The shields on this Viking ship hold a puzzle – if you jump on the first one and then the fifth one, a hidden door is revealed.

8100pts.
1

Ristar

CEREAL DRAMA

» MEGA DRIVE » 1995 » SEGA

If you weren't aware of just how much a copy of *Ristar* costs these days, you might be tempted to think of it as somewhat underrated. The platformer, starring a stretchy-armed chap who looks like a star, is a great example of what the Mega Drive was capable of in its later years. It looks and sounds wonderful, Ristar himself controls brilliantly, and it plays very differently from the likes of *Sonic*. Contemporary critics recognised just how good *Ristar* was – albeit grudgingly, as they were evidently weary of the platform game boom. They weren't the only ones that extended a less than warm welcome to *Ristar*, mind. I greeted Sega's new platform hero with some real hostility back in the mid-Nineties, largely because I saw a Sega Pro cover that said "Sonic's Dead! Long live a new hero!" and got very defensive of my existing favourite character.

But Sega really did seem to want to push *Ristar*. I've become a little bit obsessed with looking at cerealoffers.com to see what gaming companies promoted on breakfast cereals, and after fondly reminiscing about the Sugar Puffs Sega Master Challenge and the promotional *Sonic 3* yo-yos that came with Frosties, I discovered that Weetabix ran a huge Sega competition in 1995. 250 top prize winners would receive a Mega Drive II, a 32X and a copy of *Ristar*, 4,000 runners up got Mega Drive II consoles and copies of *Ristar*, and 45,750 *Ristar* T-shirts. That's an enormous promotional push – it's certainly not common for so many consoles to be given away in a competition, and it's notable that *Ristar* was the focus rather than the brand-new 32X.

I've never heard about anyone winning this competition, and there should have been loads of winners. I've never even so much as seen one of the T-shirts. I don't doubt that this competition was legitimate, but I do wonder if all of the entrants were mysteriously ejected into space. So readers, to put my troubled mind at ease, would it be possible to hear from you if you did actually win something from this giveaway? ✱

PlayStation:

RECAPTURING A LOST ART

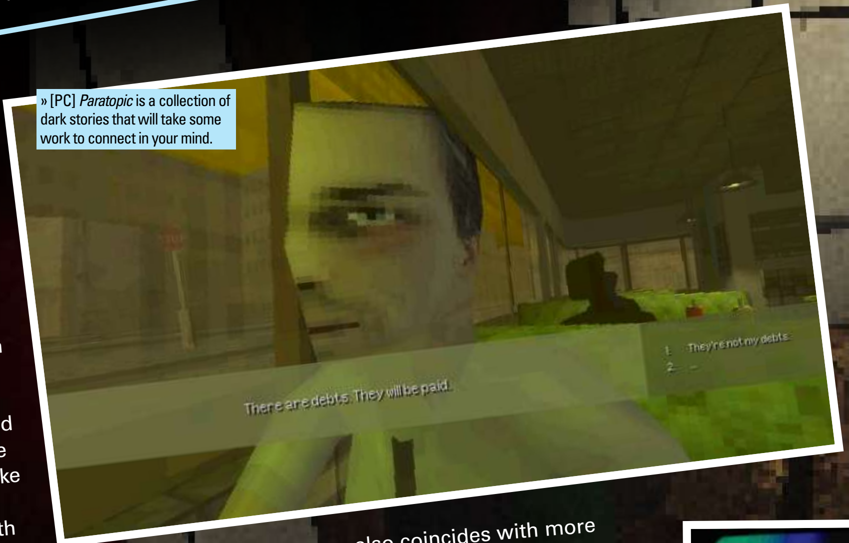
We embrace blocky polys and jagged edges as we talk to the developers bringing back the often maligned early 3D-style of the original PlayStation to discover how they are trying to unlock its untapped potential

Words by Paul Walker-Emig

» Toni Kortelhatim is the creator of *OK/NORMAL* and the man behind the 98Demake YouTube channel.

» Marina Kittaka is an artist and developer who works at Analgesic Productions.

» Melos Han-Tani is the director of Analgesic Productions, the developer behind *Anodyne* and *Anodyne 2: Return To Dust*.



» [PC] *Paratopic* is a collection of dark stories that will take some work to connect in your mind.

There are debts. They will be paid.

1. They're not my debts.
2. ...

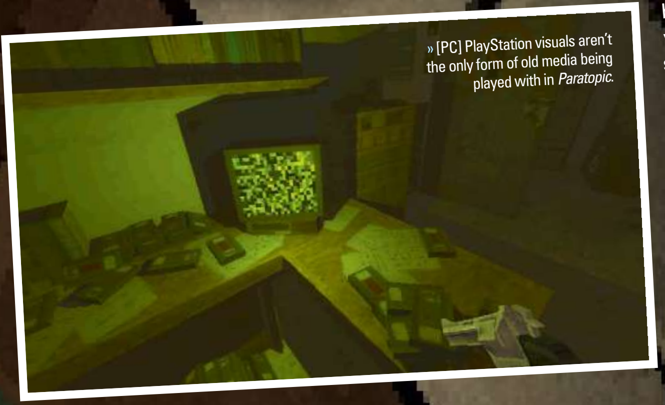
The idea of new games emulating the style of titles from bygone eras is far from rare in the modern gaming landscape. Pixel-art platformers from *Fez* to *Shovel Knight*, SNES-inspired Metroidvanias like *Axiom Verge* and *Owlboy*, and many more besides, have established the indie-driven revival of the 16-bit era as a mainstream aesthetic that sits happily alongside the 3D photorealism that tends to be favoured by the big studios. We know it is possible for styles associated with the past to make a triumphant return. Why is it, then, that the iconic polygonal style associated with the original PlayStation hasn't yet enjoyed a similar moment? The revival of the low-fi 3D aesthetic associated with that console has been far more low-key. Rather than gracing Game of the Year lists and winning high-profile awards as 16-bit-inspired titles frequently have, you tend to find games with PlayStation-style aesthetics circulating as small experimental projects on indie distribution platform itch.io, only the odd title poking its head above the parapet to gain some kind of wider recognition. We spoke to some of the creators behind these games about their reasons for returning to PlayStation visuals, the potential power of the aesthetic and the reasons why it has yet to be fully embraced by the mainstream.

When it comes to timing, the nostalgia that helped fuel the 2D 16-bit revival should be right for the PlayStation – just as developers that grew up on the SNES and Mega Drive went on to make games inspired by those systems, the generation who witnessed the mind-blowing shift to 3D that the PlayStation pioneered are old enough to be making their own games. "PlayStation-era is what Melos and I grew up playing," says Marina Kittaka, referring to her *Anodyne 2* co-developer Melos Han-Tani. "So there is an element of not only nostalgia, but a fundamental 'speaking the language' of what are now considered lo-fi 3D games. Our generation growing up also coincides with more and more 3D tools that are approachable to small developers," Marina concludes.

Toni Kortelhatim, better known as his YouTube moniker, 98Demake, also started his journey into the world of PlayStation-style graphics through nostalgia on his YouTube channel, creating versions of modern games like *GTA V* and *The Last Of Us* as if they had been made in 1998. Toni decided to run with this style to create his surreal horror title *OK/NORMAL*, going so far as to stick to the limitations of the original PlayStation to keep the game authentic.

"The whole point going in was to create a sort of a 'lost media' game," Toni explains. "I felt the PlayStation look just made sense, since there were a massive amount of really obscure games released for the original PlayStation," he says, citing the likes of *LSD: Dream Emulator*, *Kurushi* and *Kula World* as inspirations.

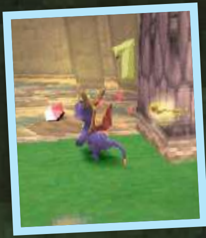
OK/NORMAL's deliberate use of warped textures, jagged edges and CRT blurriness to invoke an uncomfortable sense of the surreal showcases one of the major strengths of the PlayStation's visual style. Go back to the games of that era and there is often something unintentionally haunting about those early 3D worlds. Their flat surfaces and rudimentary textures, fading into the darkness or murk of low draw distance, feel uncomfortably sparse. The contrast that the modern wonders of 3D gaming now offer only enhance this sense of uncanny, which perhaps gives us a clue as to why games ▶



» [PC] PlayStation visuals aren't the only form of old media being played with in *Paratopic*.

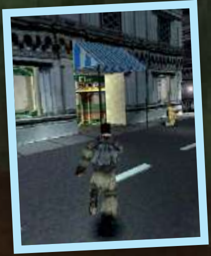
Tricks Of The Trade

THE VISUAL ARTEFACTS THAT DEFINED THE PLAYSTATION'S LOOK



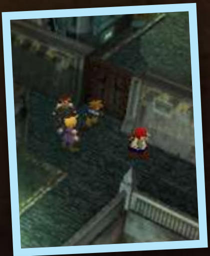
TEXTURE WARPING

As you ran around and rotated the camera (in those games that gave you use of a free camera) in the early 3D worlds of the PlayStation, you could often see the textures on walls jittering about, as if quickly readjusting themselves to fit in their assigned slot. This is an effect known as 'texture warping'.



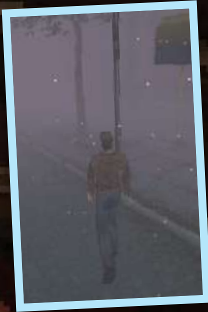
JAGGIES

Anti-aliasing is now standard within the industry, but that wasn't always the case. The PlayStation era is known for its harsh, unclean edges that would see supposedly straight lines resembling something more akin to a staircase. Anyone looking to replicate the look of the PlayStation would do well to pay attention to this.



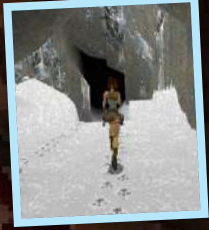
PRE-RENDERING

Pre-rendered assets – in other words, assets that are not being rendered in real-time by the hardware – were a significant resource-saving technique for the PlayStation. This technique was perhaps most famously used in the gorgeously rich pre-rendered backgrounds of *Final Fantasy VII* and *Resident Evil 2*.



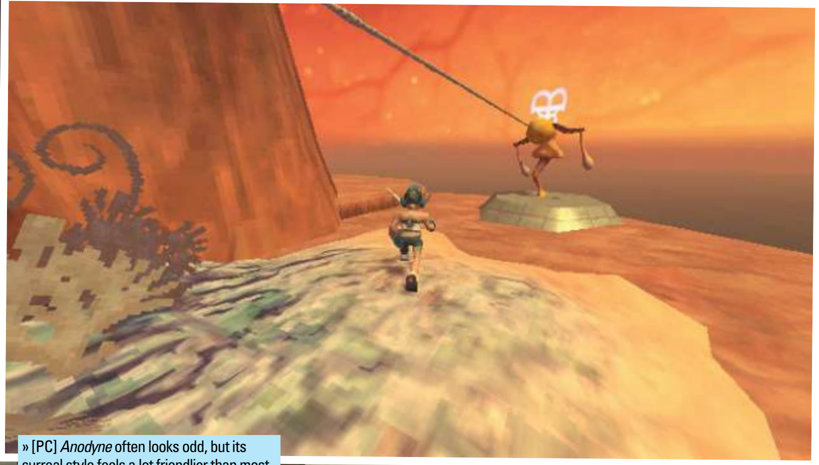
LOW DRAW DISTANCE

The PlayStation simply wasn't capable of rendering vast 3D environments that stretched off into the horizon, leading to fog and darkness used to obscure the console's low draw distance becoming a trademark element of the PlayStation look. It was sometimes employed to great atmospheric effect, as in the *Silent Hill* series.

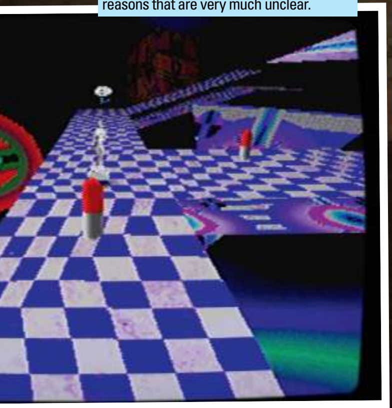


LOW-POLY

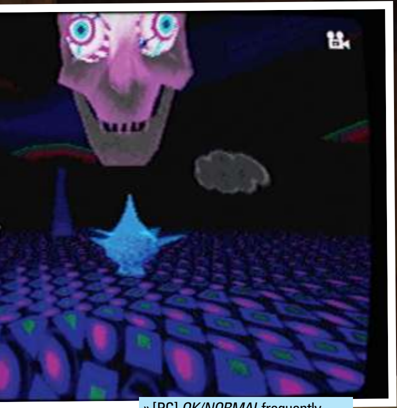
The blocky look of PlayStation characters is unquestionably one of its most recognisable features. Think of the angular anatomy of Lara Croft, the *Tekken* roster and the *Final Fantasy VII* characters who stood at an odd-disjuncture with the richly detailed backdrops that lay behind them.



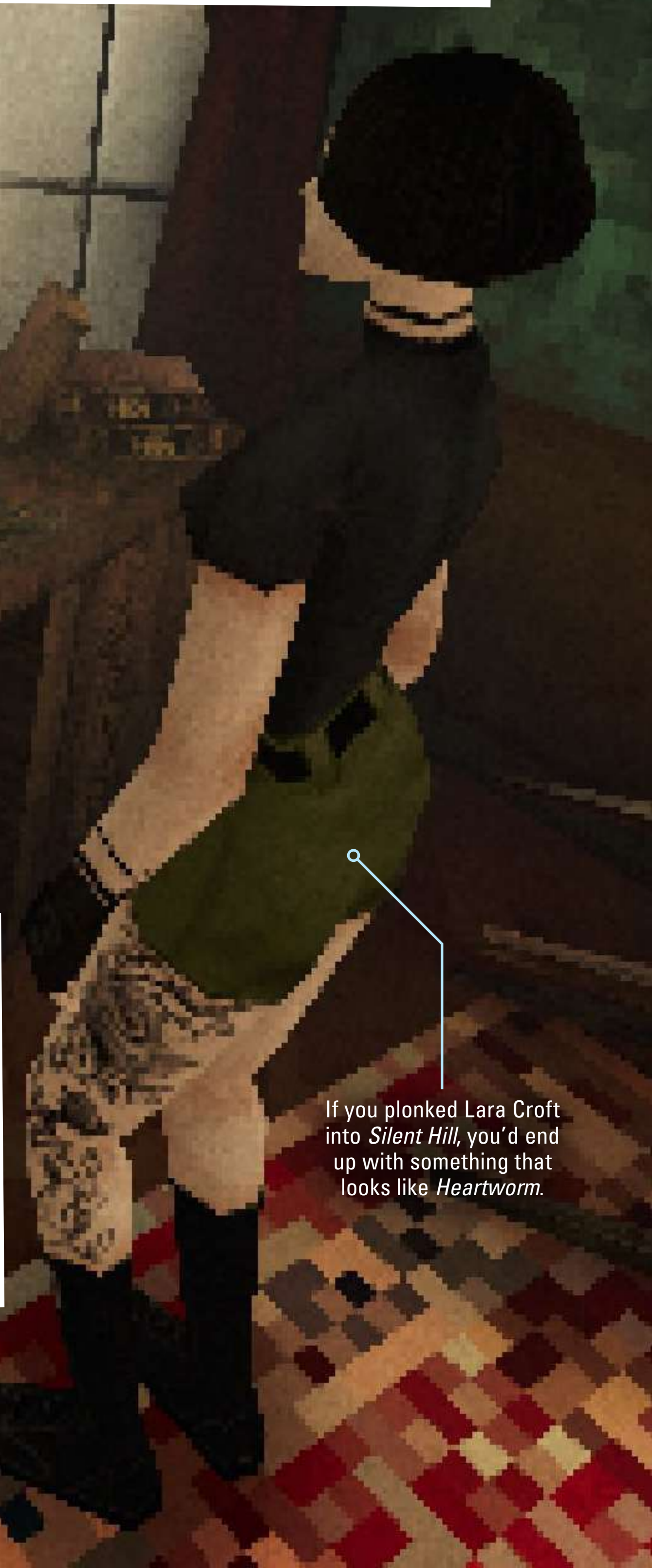
» [PC] *Anodyne* often looks odd, but its surreal style feels a lot friendlier than most of the other games covered here.



» [PC] *OK/NORMAL*'s chequered landscapes have you collecting medication while a voice occasionally berates you for reasons that are very much unclear.



» [PC] *OK/NORMAL* frequently shifts visual style and presents you with new and horrifying images.

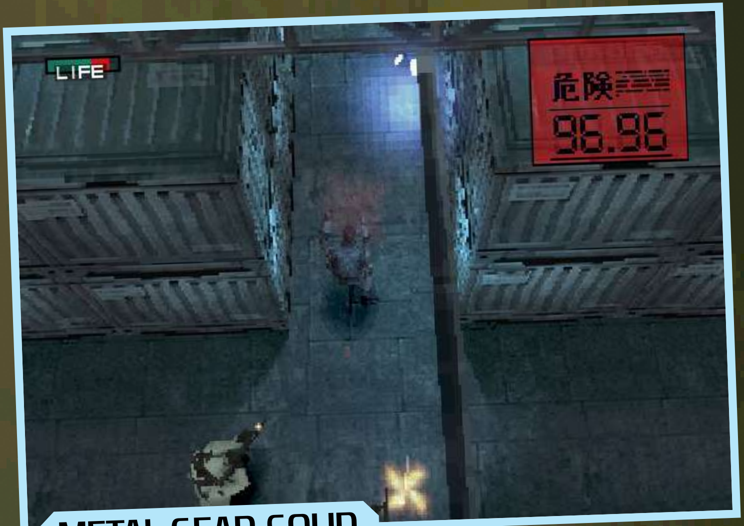


If you plonked Lara Croft into *Silent Hill*, you'd end up with something that looks like *Heartworm*.

SONY
PlayStation

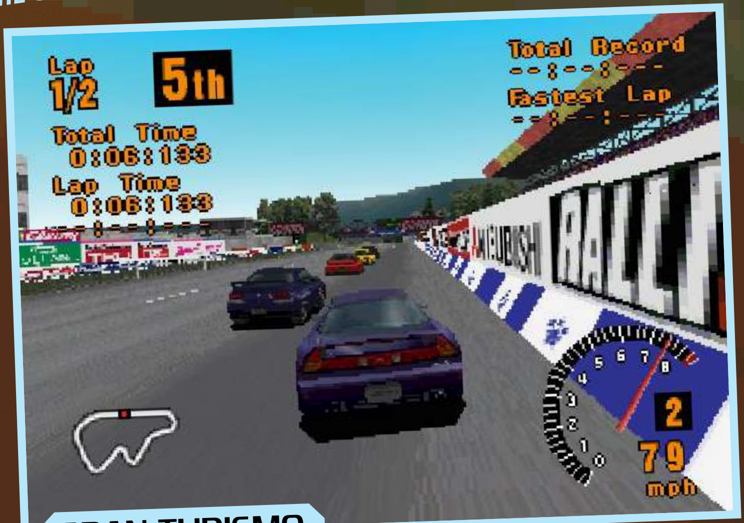
PUSHING BOUNDARIES

THE GAMES THAT DEFINED THE PLAYSTATION'S ICONIC STYLE


LIFE
危険
96.96

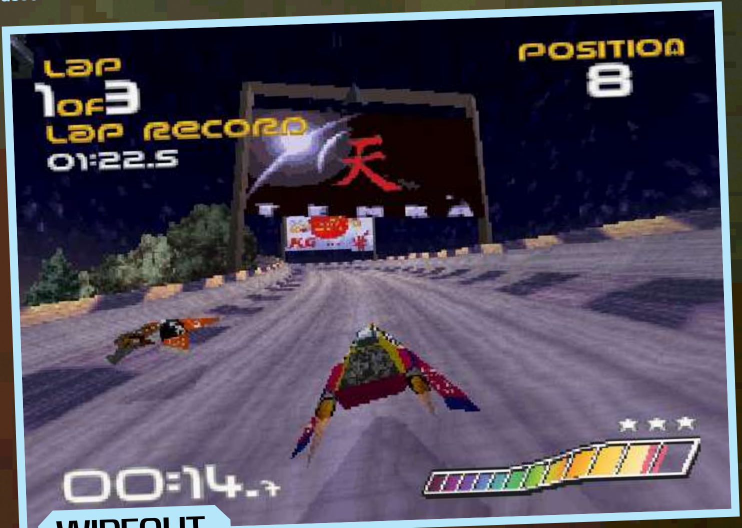
METAL GEAR SOLID

With great cinematics and clever use of textures and rendering, *Metal Gear Solid* set a new high bar for production values in videogames. It still retained the polygonal look associated with the PlayStation, but gestured at where games might go in the future.


Lap 1/2
5th
Total Time 0:06:133
Lap Time 0:06:133
Total Record
Fastest Lap
2
79
mph

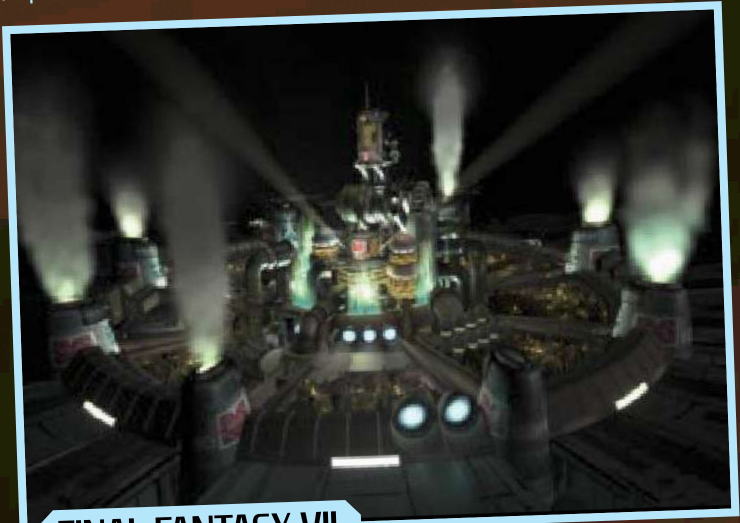
GRAN TURISMO

Though *Gran Turismo 2* would take things to another level in terms of its graphics, *Gran Turismo* felt like a window into the future. To modern eyes, it might seem stupid to talk about how realistic it looked, but it's arguably one of the pioneers in the chase for photorealistic graphics.


Lap 1of3
Lap Record 01:22.5
Position 8
00:14.7

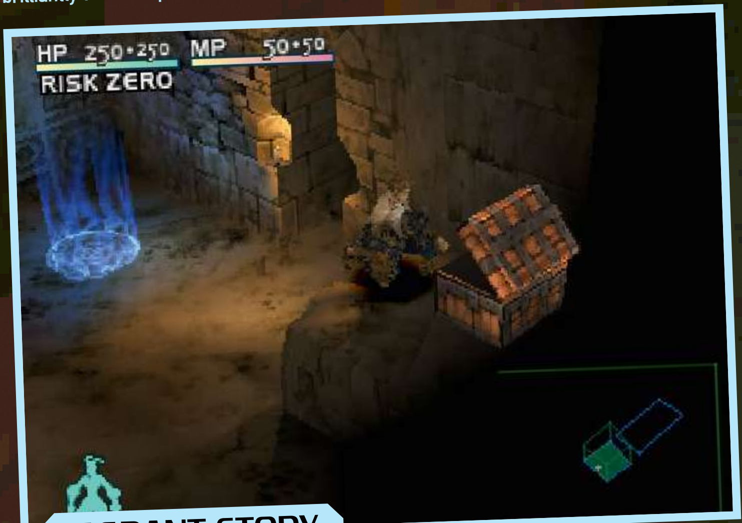
WIPEOUT

When it came to establishing the PlayStation aesthetic, few games deserve more credit than *WipEout*. It looked, sounded and felt like the future. Visuals and music combined brilliantly to curate precisely the sense of cool Sony wanted associated with its console.



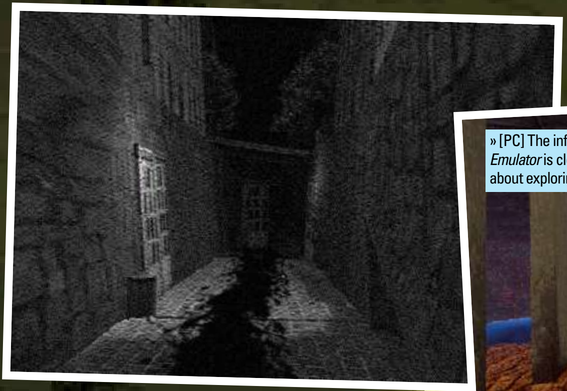
FINAL FANTASY VII

The incredible detail of pre-rendered backgrounds used on the PlayStation gave us some of its best-looking and most iconic games. We could have also opted for the *Resident Evil* series, but the dark and grimy environments of Midgar loom largest when it comes to our collective memory of the era.

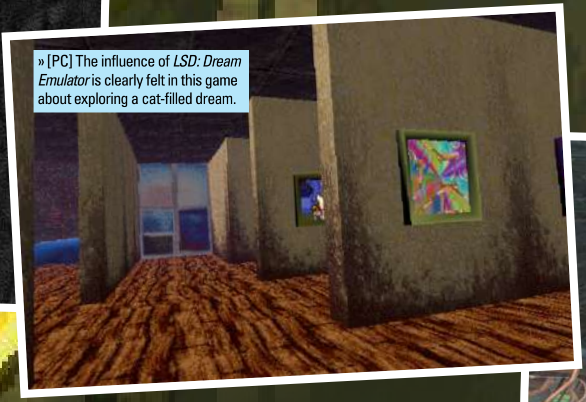

HP 250·250 MP 50·50
RISK ZERO

VAGRANT STORY

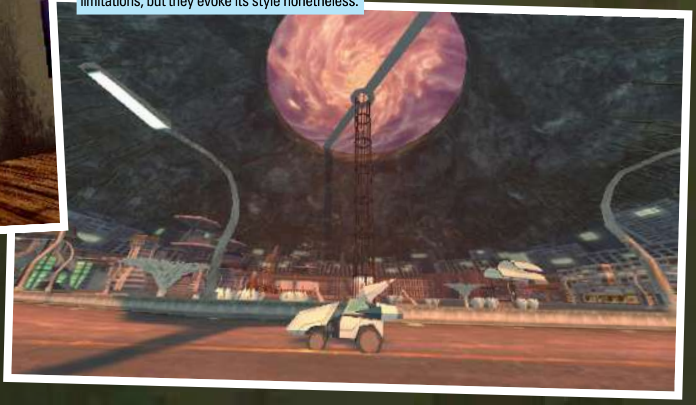
Released at the end of the PlayStation's lifespan in 2000, *Vagrant Story* is a great showcase of how much developers were able to push the system's potential. Unlike Square's previous titles, it had full 3D backgrounds and impressed with detailed models that showcased facial expressions.



» [PC] Every frame of *Concluse* drips with dread, making it a thoroughly uncomfortable place to be.



» [PC] The influence of *LSD: Dream Emulator* is clearly felt in this game about exploring a cat-filled dream.



» [PC] It's far from the case that all the games here stick religiously to the PlayStation's limitations, but they evoke its style nonetheless.

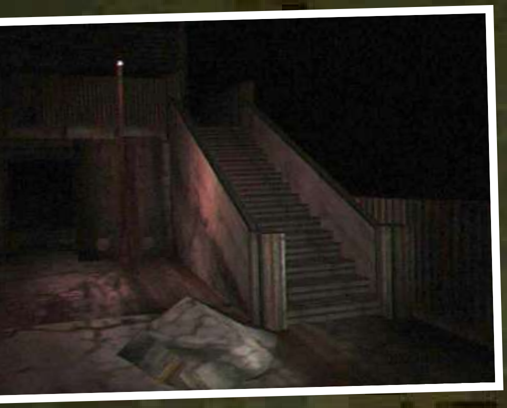
▶ that use this visual style haven't yet broken into the mainstream in the same way that pixel-art games have. There is something alienating about them. They make people uncomfortable.

Indeed, it is perhaps telling that the horror genre is unusually prevalent among the modern titles that are returning to the PlayStation aesthetic. Alongside Toni's *OK/NORMAL*, there is *Haunted PS1 Demo Disc 2020*, a collection of indie horror games presented in the form of a fake PlayStation demo, set to get a sequel in 2021. There is also the *Silent Hill*-inspired *Concluse* (due a sequel in 2021 as well) and the haunting *Paratopic*, arguably one of the better known 3D retro titles.

"I think there's something inherently scary about the PlayStation look," says Toni on the aesthetics applicability to horror. "Everything's pixelated. Everything's sort of wobbling due to the low precision vertex snapping. The textures are warped due to affine texture mapping. Usually the draw distance is very short – everything in distance is either covered in a fog, or darkness. Combine those things, and it makes for some real nightmare fuel. You see a monster or whatever emerging from the distant fog. Due to the distance, the monster is just a blob of red and skin-coloured pixels. Your mind starts racing 'what the hell is that thing?'. Even when it's closer, your mind needs to fill in the missing gaps, and whatever you create in your mind in those moments is scarier than anything a developer could create to scare you."

Jessica Harvey, one of the trio that created *Paratopic*, tells us that the atmospheric potential of PlayStation-like 3D visuals was also something that drew her to the style, though references what was actually a DOS game as one of the key influences. "Bethesda's FPS, *Terminator: Future Shock*, was perhaps the only direct influence, if only because the limitations of the tech so strongly fed back into the game and manifested a visceral sense of atmosphere and mood," Jessica tells us. "Janky, jagged bombed-out buildings, a night that by merit of a tiny draw distance consumed everything around and left you stood in a pitch black void, the composition of a limited texture palette. This showed me what *could* be done, beyond simply mining for nostalgia."

As to the question of why horror is such a prevalent part of the underground PlayStation revival, Jessica suggests we need to look beyond the realm of videogames. "Why do horror films often use a grainy lens, or, going more art-house, straight up black and white? Why are haunted VHS tapes and TV signals such powerful tropes? All of these are deeply imperfect renditions of technology. They provide us with a lack of clarity, they draw out both the material and metaphysical shadows, they are possessed by an instability that has us question whether the realities they contain are collapsed in on themselves. The analogue, the corroded technology… it all has these signal failings, these glitches that open up cracks into a void beyond the reality they transmit. You can try to simply replicate that in videogames – use a grainy post-processing or whatever – but how do you truly embody it? The Nineties *was* this," Jessica continues. "Embryonic visual techniques, jankiness from under-explored design and implementation solutions, the twitching of the lens of imprecise 3D. The PlayStation era *is* our grainy black and white film stock, albeit somewhat more beautiful."



» [PC] The in-development *Concluse 2 – The Drifting Prefecture*, shows how terrifying the unknown is with its looming dark spots.

While Jessica elegantly captures how and why replicating early 3D jank, low-fi visuals and the occasional inelegance of the nascent form is so powerful when it comes to the terrain of horror, she is also quick to highlight that this isn't the only way PlayStation-style visuals can be used, offering *Anodyne 2: Return To Dust* as an example. That game, a fascinating blend of genre, tone and style, also draws explicitly from the late Nineties era of 3D, but presents us with something far less oppressive than the other titles we've discussed so far.

"*Panzer Dragoon Saga* is one that I kept referencing for *Anodyne 2*," says Marina on Anodyne 2's inspirations. "I had a YouTube longplay of that game open in a tab for months. I also enjoyed watching chunks of *The Playstation Project* by Virtual Gaming Library on YouTube. It has five-second clips from every NTSC-U Playstation game [and I] couldn't help but feel visually inspired by literally every game. There was a really exciting and beautiful energy to that transitional period as 3D was finding its legs."

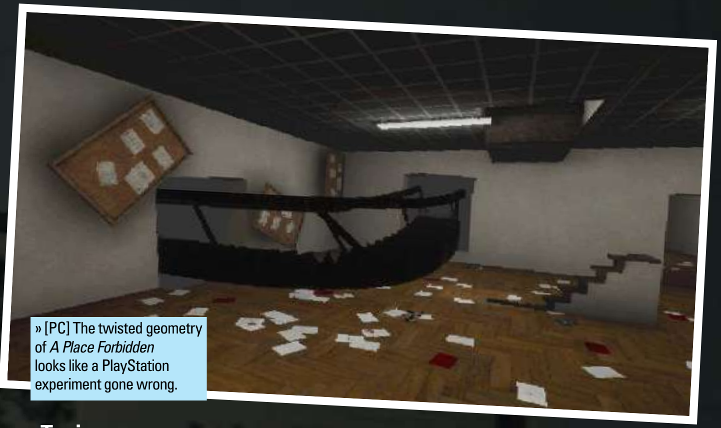
Melos argues that precisely because it was a transitional period, there's plenty of unexplored ▶

potential left in the aesthetic. "The late Nineties to mid-Noughties have an interesting mix of hardware limitations and artists trying out new things in 3D before conventions took hold. It's an experimental period with tons of variation, and in the AAA game industry's rush towards photorealism, they left behind many loose ends and unexplored pathways to interesting 3D styles, mainly viewing that era as 'ugly' and 'transitional'," he argues. "Most people generally overlook the era and aren't interested in analysing what it has to offer spatially and thematically. The Nineties had a developed style of what was 'good' visually in 2D, and a lot of indies now use that as a benchmark and reference point, while 3D ended up getting refined into photorealism or expensive workflows."

Melos suggests that there are some other factors that may account for the relative lack of games exploring Nineties-style 3D visuals. "Skill-wise, it takes work to think about what you want to expand upon and what you want to leave behind because there's so many interesting old 3D games. Why bother doing that if you can use photorealism or flat colours and call it a day? Regarding game design, 3D (with free camera rotation) is tricky to design for because of having to keep track of what the player can see as well as keeping in mind art restrictions and the game mechanics. You need to have at least a passing interest in architecture or landscapes to design effectively in 3D because of all the navigating a player will do, too. So there's more to figure out as you go [when] designing a 3D game."

The other key factor, he argues, is a financial one. "There hasn't been a 'killer' game that's used the PlayStation art style effectively in 3D, so there's no gold rush. It's proven that 2D nostalgia sells, which is why we get Metroidvania after Metroidvania, but it's yet to be seen if that's true for Nineties and Noughties 3D."

Toni doubts that we will ever see this 'killer' game. "Pixel art is kind of timeless," he says. "Every pixel-art game, especially from the 16-bit era, is still very much untouched by times as far as the graphics go. It's much easier for the eyes, so it's easier to push to the mainstream. Not everyone 'gets' the PlayStation look, nor has fond memories of it. It can be rudimentary and awkward, hence I don't think it'll ever reach the kind of popularity that pixel art has."


» [PC] The twisted geometry of *A Place Forbidden* looks like a PlayStation experiment gone wrong.

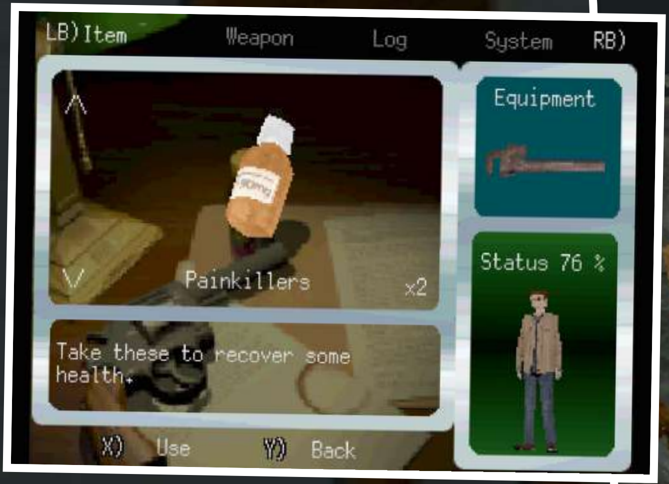
Regardless of whether time will prove Toni right or wrong, mainstream success should not be the arbiter of whether art has value. The games being produced in the niche but growing trend of retro 3D prove that there is something worthwhile to be drawn from the aesthetic and the developers we spoke to all saw plenty of potential open to be explored.

"I think it's a great style, since it's really versatile with endless opportunities," Toni says. "It's fairly easy to create something aesthetically pleasing, even for beginners. As a solo developer, I don't have the resources to create extended worlds in a photorealistic manner. With the PlayStation style, you can go nuts."

Jessica too acknowledges that there are practical implications for small developers using low-fidelity visuals, but argues that there are artistic reasons to explore the style too, referencing its "impressionistic" qualities. "We have potential for the most gorgeous broad brush strokes. The literal qualities of high-end visuals shut us off from a lot of what we can do with chunky polys and gutter resolutions. Those hints and suggestions and wisps of form."

Even within the genre of horror, Jessica suggests there's more to be done. "We have latent hauntology to play with," she says. "That the era's tech and design was so embryonic, that we were in a transnational stage before things coalesced, we find ourselves in a realm filled with potentials – things that could have been. The domain of then unanswered questions and undiscovered solutions, of alternatives that never came to pass. To be haunted by these lost futures is something that, as far as the medium goes, only the dawn of 3D era can offer with such dynamism and mass relatability. Where do we go with that? This is my main interest in the aesthetic. Multitudes of creative space to explore both emotively and with respect to sociopolitical commentary." Jessica also disagrees that the harshness of the characteristically angular style

One of the early attempts to emulate the style of the PlayStation is Kitty Horrorshow's sickeningly scary psychological horror *Anatomy*.

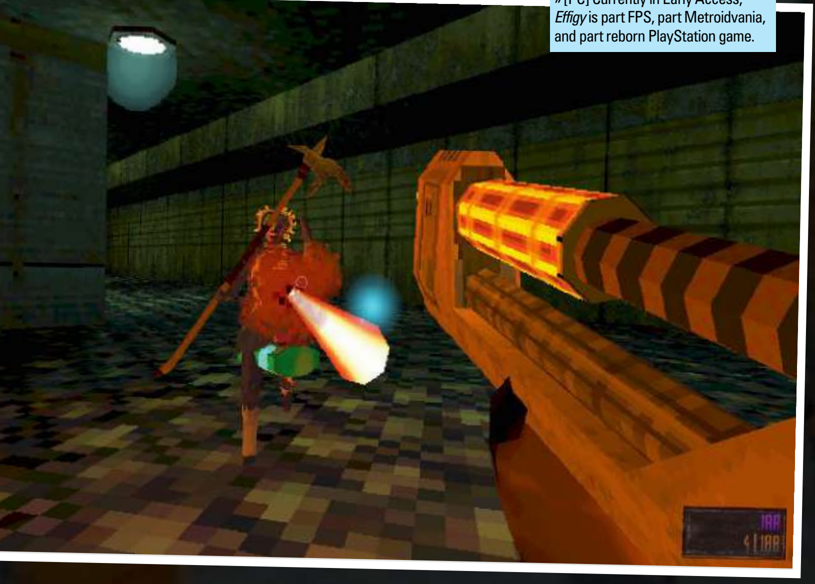


Take these to recover some health.

» [PC] Even the inventory in survival horror love letter *Back In 1995* calls to mind its *Resident Evil* inspirations.

precludes it from ever making a breakthrough to a larger audience. "I don't believe that this impacts the abstract 'appeal' of the aesthetic," she says. "That the mid-Nineties era was a collective memory to us makes it immanently relatable. It's up to us as creatives whether we choose to subvert or complement that relatability. Next to this, as an intersecting line, we do have the more family friendly connotations of the N64 and its visuals' distinctive traits to toy with."

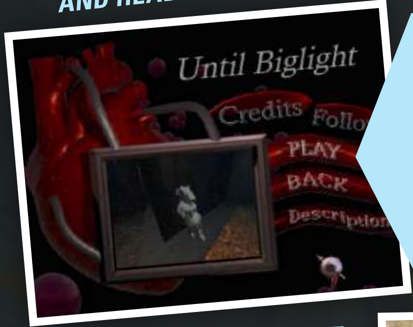
There's something that feels fitting about the relative obscurity of the underground revival of PlayStation aesthetics. These games' tendency for strangeness and experimentalism feels perfectly congruent with many of the obscure curios that actually came out on the system in the Nineties. Their ability to tease out powerful responses from the quirkiness of its distinct polygonal style, to enhance the sense of innate mystery and unease that often accompanies it, is something that feels at home hiding from the attention of widespread recognition, perhaps all the more powerful because of an outsider status that makes it feel raw, unsterilised and aggressive. If it is to stay that way, so be it. We're perfectly happy to celebrate what creators are already doing by returning to this forgotten vision of 3D. But let's not place any limits on where it might go. It's a trend that's slowly becoming more visible. PlayStation-style visuals may yet be back to a degree we never anticipated. *



» [PC] Currently in Early Access, *Effigy* is part FPS, part Metroidvania, and part reborn PlayStation game.

New But Old

LOWER YOUR POLYGON COUNT AND HEAD BACK TO THE NINETIES

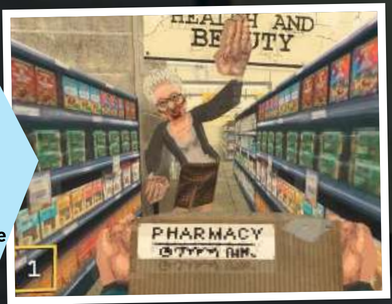


HAUNTED PS1 DEMO DISC 2020

Collecting work from a host of developers, this fake PlayStation demo disc features the likes of *Heartworm* (which looks like a cross between *Tomb Raider* and *Silent Hill*), *Dead Heat* (where zombies live alongside humans) and *Dread Delusion* (a fantasy horror RPG), all looking like they come straight from the Nineties.

NIGHT OF THE CONSUMERS

Part comedy, part horror, *Night Of The Consumers* sees you working in a supermarket desperately trying to stock the shelves while dealing with near psychopathic customers who refuse to leave you alone. Seeing those weirdly stretched low-texture faces hurtling towards you is horrifying.

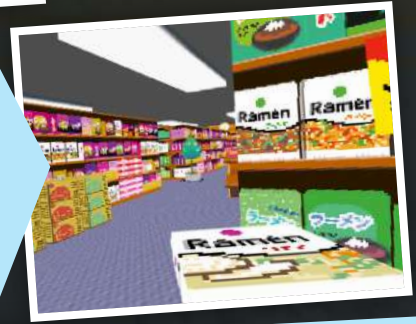


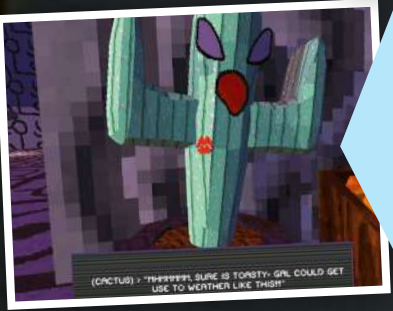
CONCLUSE

With a story and setting reminiscent of *Silent Hill*, *Concluse* similarly goes about constructing an oppressive sense of dread. Its low-res graphics aim to make it feel like a lost PlayStation game and the sequel due for release in 2021 stays true to that style.

TASTY RAMEN

Though a version of this appears on the *Haunted PS1 Demo Disc*, it's also available as a standalone release and a second episode is in the works. A colourful title with Japanese influences, this game is essentially about being haunted by a persistent bowl of noodles.





(CACTUS) > "MMMMMM, SURE IS TOASTY- GAL COULD GET USE TO WEATHER LIKE THIS!!"

CRYPT UNDERWORLD

Successfully funded through Kickstarter, the in-development sequel to *Crypt Worlds* marries its surreal PlayStation-style visuals with a bizarre sense of humour. It describes itself as a "first-person hell labyrinth" that features "exciting piss-based gameplay".

NINTENDO GAMECUBE
NINTENDO GAMECUBE™ Broadband Adapter
DOL-015
PATENTS ISSUED AND PENDING
SEE BOOKLET.
Nintendo
MADE IN PHILIPPINES

GameCube Adapter fact

■ Sega shut down its official *Phantasy Star Online* servers in 2007, but Modem Adapter users can still connect to private servers. *Homeland* can still be played online, as the console itself acts as a server.

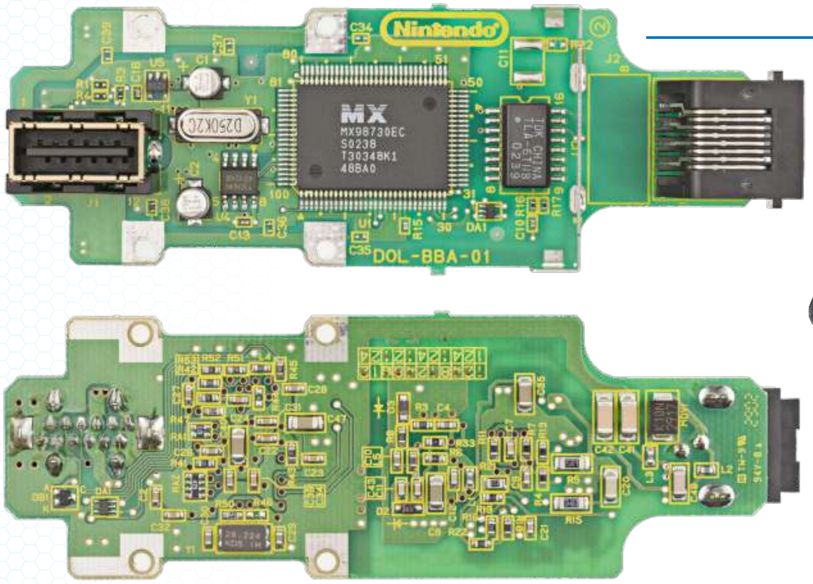
Modem Adapter/ Broadband Adapter

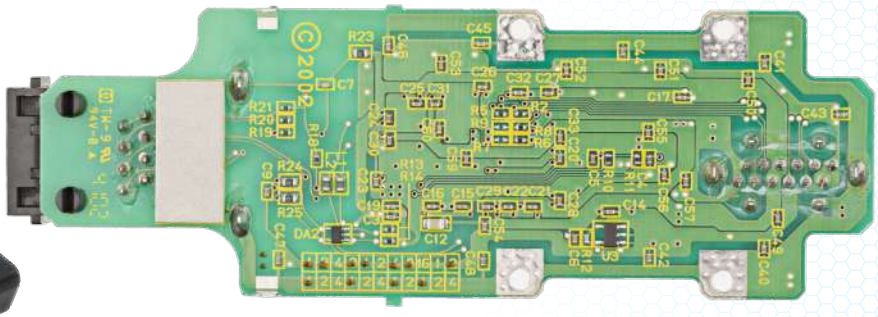
» PLATFORM: GAMECUBE **» RELEASED:** 2003 **» COST:** MODEM: £35 (LAUNCH), £35+ (TODAY, BOXED) £19+ (TODAY, UNBOXED), BROADBAND: £35 (LAUNCH), £85+, (TODAY, BOXED), £50+ (TODAY, UNBOXED)

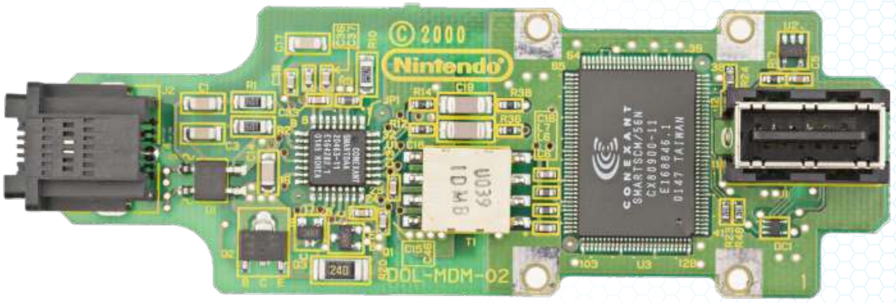
The Modem Adapter and Broadband Adapter are two very similar networking peripherals for the GameCube, which plug into one of the two expansion ports on the bottom of the console. The Modem Adapter provides 56k dial-up capabilities, while the Broadband Adapter has an ethernet port for connection to broadband modems and other GameCubes.

Nintendo's long history of being less interested in online gaming than its competitors started here. The only game to support the devices at launch was Sega's *Phantasy Star Online Episode I & II*, and only three other third-party online games were released – *Phantasy Star Online Episode I & II Plus*, *Phantasy Star Online Episode III: CARD Revolution* and the Japan-only *Homeland*, which didn't support the Modem Adapter.

What drives demand for the Broadband Adapter today is its role in three first party games, which used it not for online play but for local networked multiplayer. Those were *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*, *1080° Avalanche* and *Kirby Air Ride*. These functions are all naturally intact since they didn't rely on online servers, and players have used this functionality to bring these offline games online via tunnelling software such as Warp Pipe and more recently XLink Kai. *





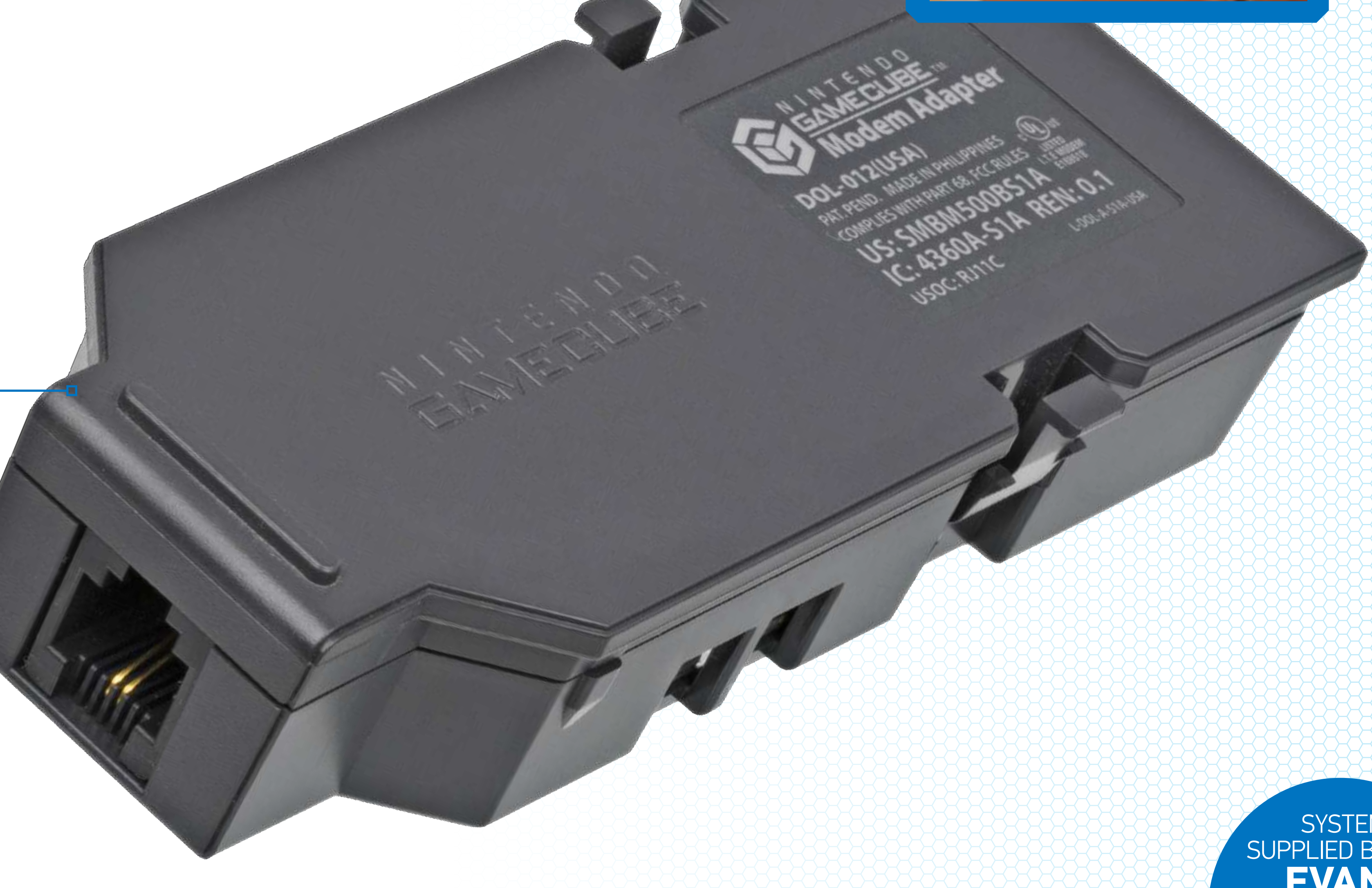


ESSENTIAL GAME

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

There's nothing *wrong* with four players playing *Mario Kart* on a single GameCube. It's *fine*. But it should be known that for dedicated souls, it's possible to make the experience so much better. For example, rather than splitting the screen, why not give everyone their own? And by everyone, we mean eight players – not the usual four. It sounds like a dream, but with a network switch and eight GameCubes equipped with Broadband Adapters (not to mention eight TVs and eight copies of the game), this can be your reality. Time to start saving some money, we reckon.

5th
TIME 00:39:930
LAP 1/3
48 mph


NINTENDO GAMECUBE™
Modem Adapter
DOL-012(USA)
PAT. PEND. MADE IN PHILIPPINES
COMPLIES WITH PART 68, FCC RULES
US: SMBM500BS1A
IC: 4360A-S1A REN: 0.1
USOC: RJ11C
NINTENDO GAMECUBE

SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

Sony Ericsson
Cyber-shot

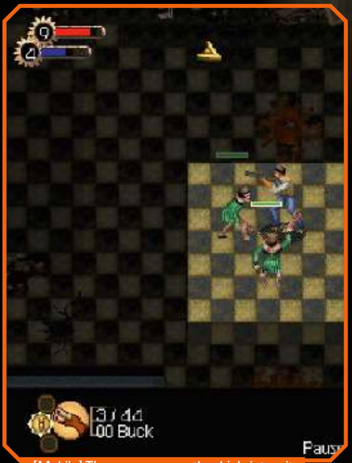
CLASSIC MOBILE GAMES

Mobile games aren't exactly favoured by the retro community, but that doesn't mean that we didn't have some amazing titles on the platform throughout the Noughties. Retro Gamer is here to prove to you that old phones are the retro handheld that time forgot

Words by Zach Murphy

BIOSHOCK 2D

■ DEVELOPER: **IG FUN** ■ YEAR: **2010**



» [Mobile] There are some rather high-intensity battles in the game that'll really keep you on the edge of your seat.

■ **Irrational Games' *BioShock* drew in fans from a multitude of genres and backgrounds, and caused them all to fall in love with the same thing.** *BioShock* had a lot going for it, with underwater Fifties aesthetics, utopian inspirations and an incredible narrative full of twists and turns. It was so refined and polished that it was hard to point out any particular faults with the game, and it went on to spawn two sequels, which have since been remastered and re-released across multiple platforms.

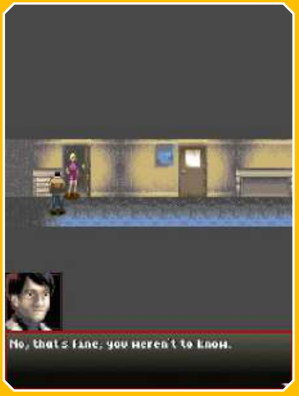
In 2010, a few years after the release of the original game, 2K teamed up with IG Fun to 'de-make' it for mobile devices. This led to a notoriously hard-to-find version for BREW devices, a now-delisted iOS game that had horrendous framerate issues, and perhaps most interesting, a 2D top-down reimagining of the game for Java-compatible mobile devices.

BioShock 2D features an array of plasmids and tonics from the main game, telekinesis and incinerate both make appearances, as does electro bolt. You'll be switching between these and your more traditional weaponry on the fly as you explore the dark and dingy environments of Rapture, and they all control pretty well too. Tonics are pretty basic, granting you perks such as a larger health pool or the chance to find more bullets.

Weaponry is much more useful than the slow-acting plasmids though, and most of the weapons also have alternate ammunition types to pierce through armour and such. Starting the game off with your trusty wrench, you can stealth your way through by stunning your foes with a plasmid, then turning their head to mush with a well-placed swing of the tool. Gaining access to the shotgun and Tommy gun later in the campaign is a real highlight though, as they can make quick work of your enemies.

Also filling up your item slots are EVE hypos and first aid kits, used to replenish your health and ADAM (which acts as mana for your plasmids).You'll find these everywhere, but still you'll need to stay on top of them as they do not process automatically when you are running low. Health is a little easier as you can also regain it by eating an assortment of different food items littered around the environment and on the bodies of your fallen enemies.

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

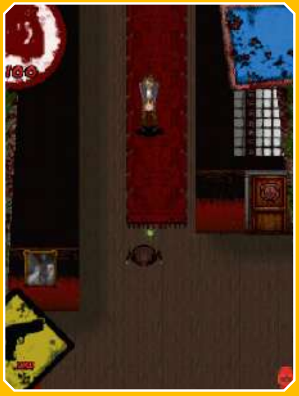


No, that's fine, you weren't to know.

NOWHERE

DEVALLEY ENTERTAINMENT, 2009

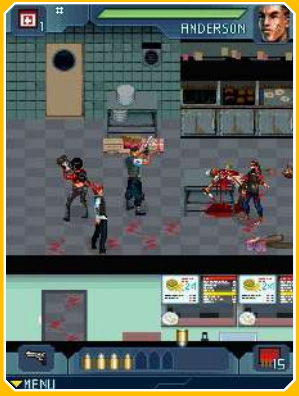
■ *Nowhere* is quite the cult classic for the platform. Featuring a huge emphasis on narrative, *Nowhere* balances two different gameplay styles through two playable characters. One character plays a detective role, and the other is more action-oriented. This high-production quality horror romp is essential.



TERROR'S SEED

ZED, 2008

■ An eerie shooter taking place in a haunted mansion, *Terror's Seed* is all about survival. Ammunition is severely limited and darkness enrobes each and every corner of the mansion. If you're going to scream in fear at a mobile game, this is probably the one that'll make you do so.



ZOMBIE INFECTION

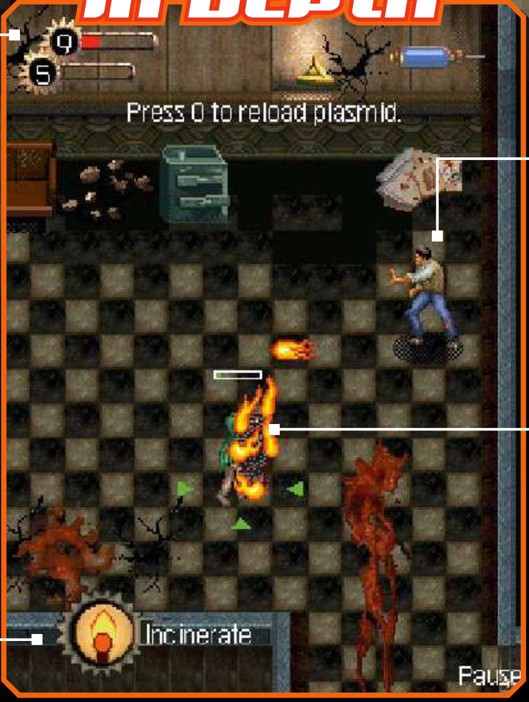
GAMELOFT, 2008

■ A multiple narrative zombie shooter, there's a lot going on in Gameloft's *Resident Evil*-inspired 2D adventure. We're talking boss battles, inventory management and precision aiming. *Zombie Infection* is all about popping zombie skulls open with whatever you can find, and it's a lot of fun.

The game really sets itself apart on the platform by featuring cutscenes, just enough storytelling to digest and some huge, beautiful set pieces that'll fill you with awe. It also nails enemy variety, with a wide range of splicers from the main title making their return, as well as fan favourites like the Big Daddies and the Little Sisters. Learning how to adapt to each of the enemy types is incremental to success, and you'll need to use your brain to take out some of the tougher non-boss enemies.

BioShock 2D is undoubtedly one of the best mobile games from the era, and it's a real shame that games like this are being left behind due to snobbism. Titles like this prove that classic mobile gaming is a viable option for handheld gamers the world over.

IN DEPTH



Press 0 to reload plasmid.

HEALTH + ADAM

■ You'll need to keep an eye on both of these meters, as well as the number of refills you have (on the left of each).

YOUR CHARACTER

■ You'll need to keep an eye on your positioning in order to line up shots and avoid incoming fire, similarly to how you'd line yourself up in a beat-'em-up to avoid throwing-knives.

ENEMIES

■ These guys are all gunning for you, so you better master the combat system if you want to survive in the drug-fuelled city of Rapture.

WEAPONS WHEEL

■ This is where you can switch between your active weapons and plasmids to use on your enemies. There are a couple of wheels here to switch between.

Minority Report

BLUR MOBILE

■ DEVELOPER: **GLU MOBILE** ■ YEAR: **2010**

■ ***Blur* was a rather short-lived arcade racing series that aimed to blend the physics and graphics of titles like *Need For Speed* with the fun and silliness of the *Mario Kart* series, and the 2010 PS3/X360 release still has an active player-base built around it.** While the core game failed to make enough of a commercial splash to keep the IP afloat, that didn't stop Acitivision from teaming up with mobile gaming powerhouse Glu to create a tie-in.

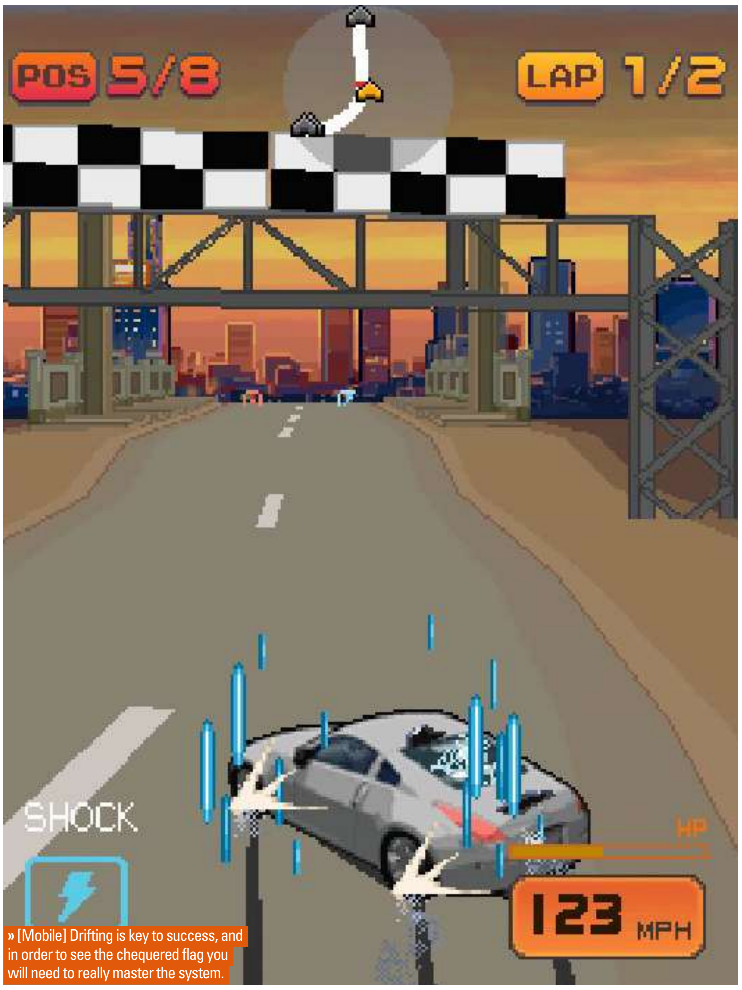
Probably one of the longest racing experiences on the platform, *Blur*'s career mode is made up of a variety of areas, with three events in each. These events borrow heavily from the main game, with power-up-based racing making for most of the action, albeit this time the game also features boss battles akin to *Burnout 3*'s Showdown races.

Power-ups play a huge part in the core gameplay, and range from homing charges, to nitro boosts and shields. There are around five or so different pickups and they are all useful in their own way.

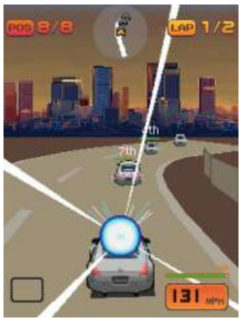
We got a lot of use out of the barge power-up, pulling up alongside other vehicles and slamming the button to send them flying into a scrapheap on the roadside.

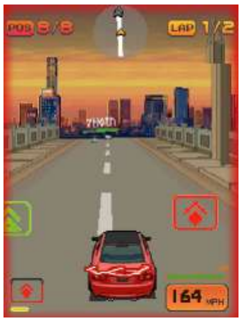
There are a tonne of cars to unlock as well, and they are all licensed. Starting off with a Nissan 350Z, you'll soon move on to much fancier supercars. The vehicle models look pretty decent for the hardware, but the environments are mostly grey blocky textures (or lack thereof).

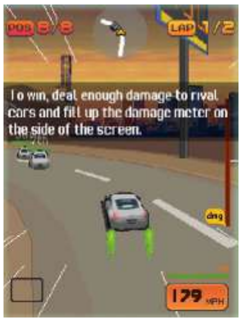
Blur is a fantastic racing title, no matter the platform. The mechanics translate well to the smaller screen, and despite some of the hardware limitations the game manages to capture the feeling and fun of its console counterpart. A solid choice for sure if you're looking for a racer to play on your old mobile.



» [Mobile] Drifting is key to success, and in order to see the chequered flag you will need to really master the system.

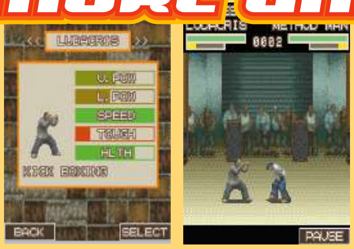






To win, deal enough damage to rival cars and fill up the damage meter on the side of the screen.

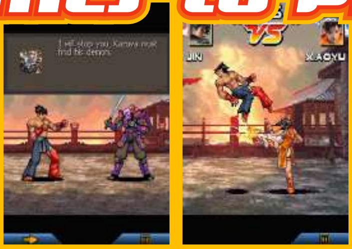
MORE GAMES TO PLAY



» DEF JAM: FIGHT FOR NEW YORK

■ DEV: **EA MOBILE INC**
■ YEAR: **2007**

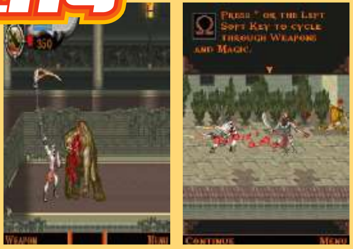
■ Yeah boyee! That's right, you can play *Def Jam* on the go. The mobile version of *FFNY* brought back a fair few of your favourite mid-Noughties rappers to duke it out with. Method Man, Xzibit and Snoop Dogg all appear for this 2D fighting game adorned with chip-tune versions of Ludacris' hits. Fill up your Blazin' meter and perform devastating special moves until your opponent can't bear to stand any longer.



» TEKKEN RESOLUTE

■ DEV: **NAMCO BANDAI**
■ YEAR: **2010**

■ You'd be forgiven for not realising that *Tekken* had entered the world of 2D outside of its *Street Fighter* crossover. *Tekken Resolute* features eight characters not called Eddy Gordo, and throws the player into Tekken Force mode akin to the *Streets of Rage* series. As one would expect from Namco's premier fighting series, combat boils down to juggling combos. It's a fun romp and fans of the series are bound to feel at home.

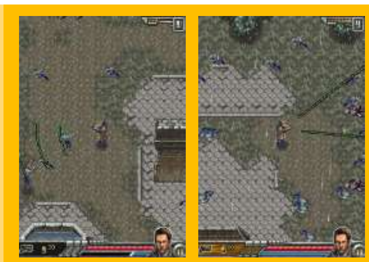


Press * or the Left Soft Key to cycle through Weapons and Magic.

» GOD OF WAR: BETRAYAL

■ DEV: **JAVAGROUND/SOE LOS ANGELES**
■ YEAR: **2007**

■ *God Of War: Betrayal* took the gut-ripping gameplay of the PlayStation exclusive series, and thrust it into 2D. Playing almost like an 18-rated take on *Aladdin* for the Mega Drive, *Betrayal* is a button masher in the best way. We're talking combos, finishing moves, a variety of weapons and boss fights. *Betrayal* also features a fair bit of platforming, for those of you who don't get as gleeful over decimating hordes of enemies.



» THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD: NIGHTMARE

■ DEV: **ROCKPOOL GAMES**
■ YEAR: **2007**

■ With this spin-off, Sega's iconic arcade shooter went through a perspective shift. Now an isometric on-rails experience, *Nightmare* had players blast zombies in the face with a variety of awesome weapons across hauntingly beautiful levels. Rockpool managed to work in a boatload of charm and polish into this one, and we'd have zero qualms with more *House Of The Dead* games continuing in this fashion.

XIII

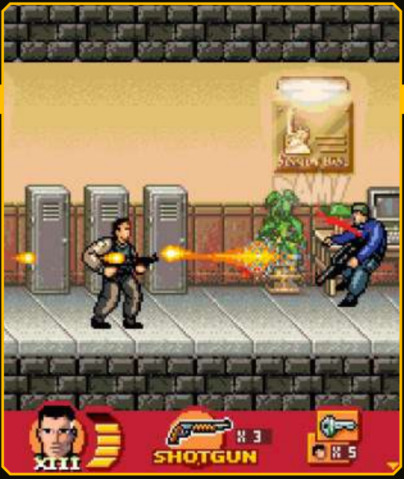
■ DEVELOPER: **GAMELOFT** ■ YEAR: **2003**

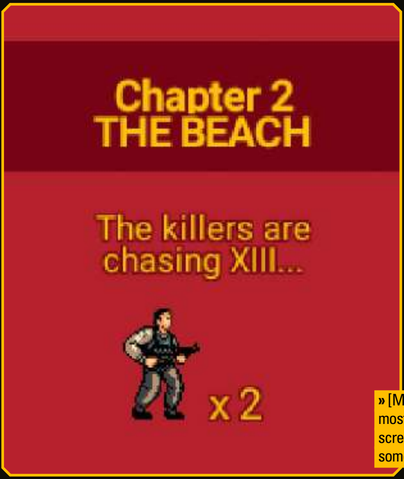
■ Espionage FPS thriller *XIII* is considered to be quite the cult classic, and if it hadn't been for the recent remake it would still be an IP held in high regard by gamers. Despite the game not performing very well commercially, it ended up having two side-scrolling spin-off titles for mobile, the aptly named *XIII*, and its sequel *XIII2: Covert Identity*.

Gameplay consists of you running-and-gunning through levels, shooting down enemies and doing some mild platforming. There's a few different weapons on offer here (though there are more in the sequel) and it's easy, simplistic fun. The game plays pretty closely to the *Metal Slug* series, so fans of SNK's iconic series will feel right at home here.

XIII also lays the plot on pretty thick, but unlike some other handheld titles that hit you with barrages of exposition, it's quite easy to digest here, told through small text excerpts at the bottom of the screen clearly and concisely.

We'd say without a doubt that *XIII* is one of the best run-and-gun games on the platform, and that's saying a lot considering it was also home to multiple *Metal Slug* games, as well as some exclusive *Contra* titles. You might consider checking it out if you're into the original console game or the graphic novels the games are based on.

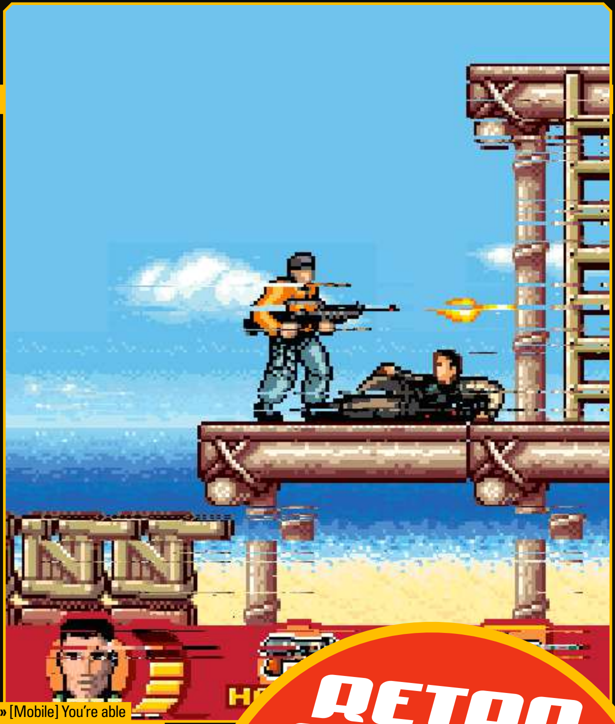



Chapter 2
THE BEACH

The killers are chasing XIII...

x 2

» [Mobile] The story is told mostly through brief screens like this one, with some dialogue in between.



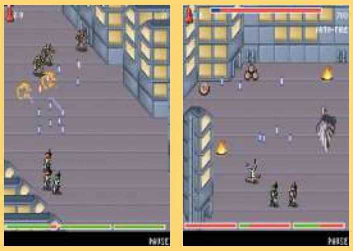
» [Mobile] You're able to slide under enemy fire, in order to take their legs out and riddle them with bullets.

RETRO STINKER

» SHADOW OF ROME: THE DIE IS CAST

■ **CAPCOM** ■ **2008**

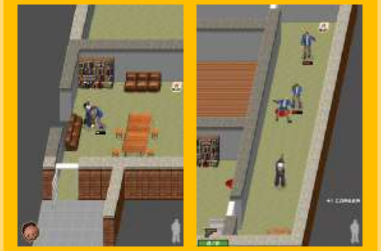
■ With *The Die Is Cast*, Capcom took a console gorefest and downgraded it into a pretty naff *Bejeweled* clone. *Shadow Of Rome* really deserved a better follow-up than this weak match-three snooze-fest.



» STAR WARS REPUBLIC COMMANDO: ORDER 66

■ DEV: **MAGELLAN INTERACTIVE**
■ YEAR: **2005**

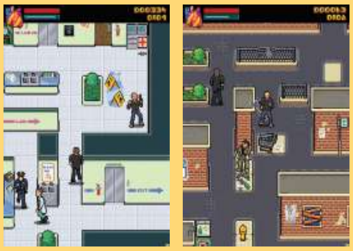
■ *Star Wars* fans were pretty peeved when tactical FPS *Republic Commando* ended on a cliffhanger and the planned sequel was canned. Unknown to most, the series continued, not only in book form, but with a second game. Shifting to a top-down perspective, *Order 66* tells the story of Delta Squad as they execute the Jedi Order – expect boss fights, strategic positioning and even some lore – oh, and Shaak Ti dies again.



» TRUE CRIME: NEW YORK CITY

■ DEV: **MFORMA**
■ YEAR: **2005**

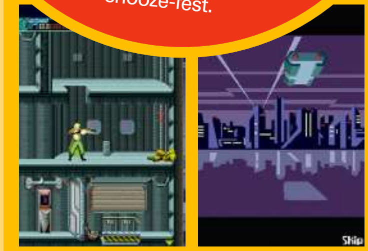
■ Another title based on its console counterpart, *True Crime: NYC* is an isometric action game with some five-o flavour that's been double-dipped in variety sauce. This version of the game features many narrative choices and actions, including stealing evidence and beating down bad guys post-surrender. Gunplay feels tight and responsive, and there's a lot to do over the course of the campaign. *True Crime* is a solid mobile title.



» CRANK

■ DEV: **SILVERBIRCH STUDIOS/VELVETELVIS**
■ YEAR: **2006**

■ Jason Statham's *Crank* was an adrenaline-filled rollercoaster of a movie that seemed almost destined for the videogame world, unfortunately this never really happened outside of a Flash game and this little mobile game. In *Crank*, you run around a large area collecting pills and tasers, while being shot at by bad guys and trying to keep your rush going. It's a simple high-score kind of title, but definitely worth a go!



» CYBERPUNK: THE ARASAKA'S PLOT

■ DEV: **MAYHEM STUDIOS**
■ YEAR: **2006**

■ CD Projekt Red's *Cyberpunk 2077* wasn't the first time the IP had taken the form of a videogame, as this *Flashback*-inspired adventure hit mobile stores over a decade ago. *The Arasaka's Plot* is a side-scrolling action title at first-glance, but has a surprising amount of depth with levelling, upgrades and cybernetic implants rounding off some rather snazzy RPG elements. The game also features full-motion cutscenes!

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

retro GAMER
River City GIRLS
IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER
SINCLAIR ZX80
WARIO
JOHN GIBSON
MYSTICAL NINJA

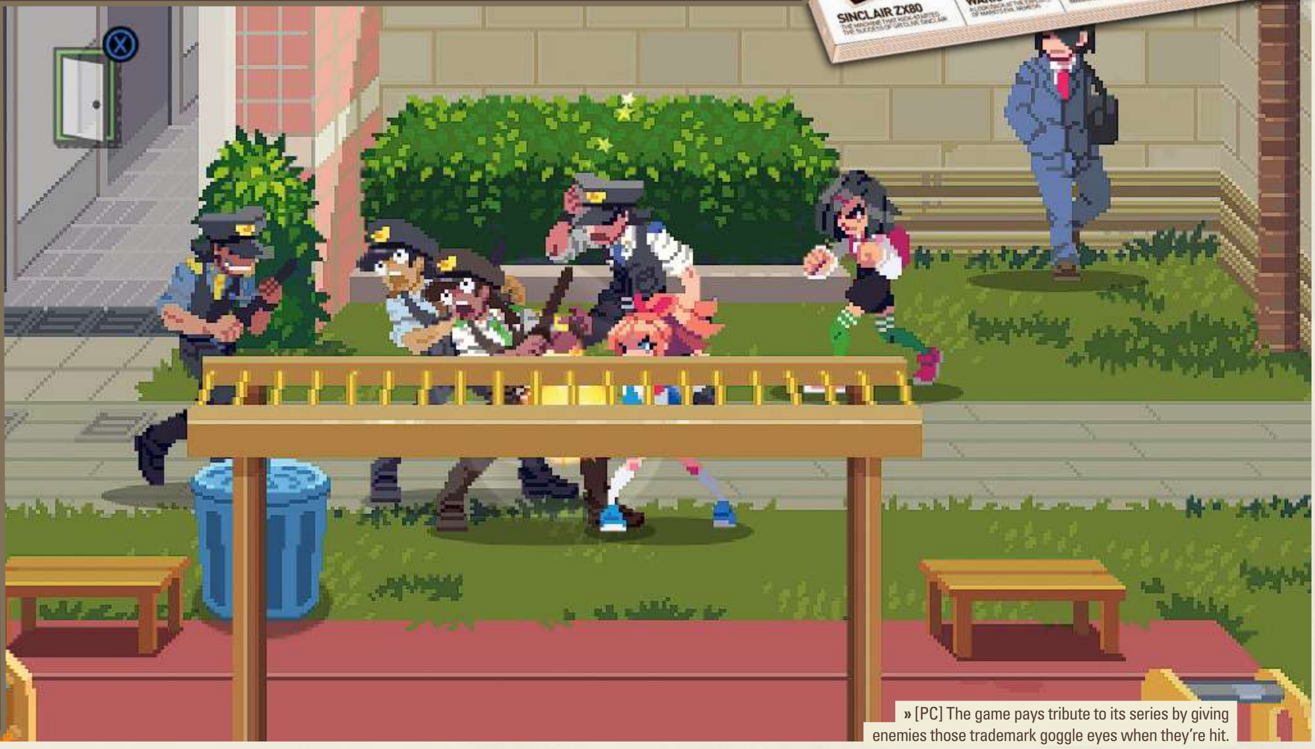
Info

- » **System:** PC, PS4, XBO, Switch
- » **Year:** 2019
- » **Publisher:** Arc System Works
- » **Developer:** WayForward
- » **Key People:** Priscilla Hamby (artist), Adam Tierney (director)

Go Deeper

» Complete the game then carry your unlocked moves over to New Game +, or start a new run as original series heroes Riki and Kunio.

» Expect cameos from *Double Dragon* characters including the series' first boss Abobo and *Double Dragon Neon* end boss Skullmageddon.



» [PC] The game pays tribute to its series by giving enemies those trademark goggle eyes when they're hit.

Of all the old-school genres to have enjoyed a renaissance, arcade-style beat-'em-ups have proven most resistant to change. These often still feel like they're from an era of arcade cabinets with built-in ashtrays. River City Girls is mostly overlooked, but it's one of the best of them

Words by Robert Zak

RIVER CITY GIRLS

THE BACKGROUND

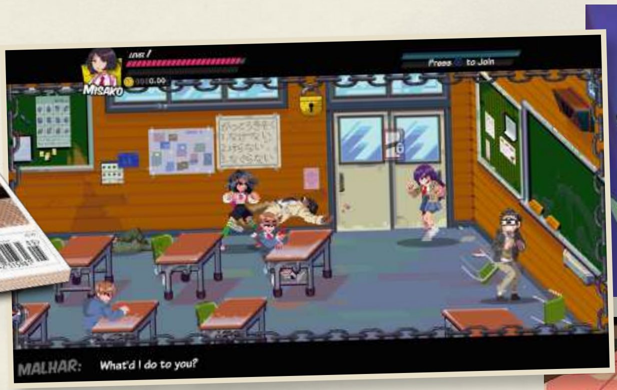
River City Girls is the latest in a procession of sequels and spin-offs to the 1989 NES beat-'em-up *River City Ransom*, and the most successful breakaway from the 8-bit stumpy art style that was the *Kunio-Kun* series' calling card for so many years. *River City Ransom* was a game ahead of its time, with non-linear exploration and RPG elements woven through all the fisticuffs. By going for 32-bit-inspired pixel art and layering the game's prescient systems with brash characters and personality, *River City Girls* revitalises the series for the modern day.

The game still follows the deliberately anachronistic conventions of the genre – the moonwalk glides up and down the screen to avoid enemy attacks, the suplexes, the improvised punch-kick combos to stunlock your enemies. Such staid mechanics are no doubt one of the reasons why beat-'em-ups have retreated from their prime position in Nineties arcades and 16-bit consoles into a niche today. But it's also precisely that rhythmic familiarity that draws us devout fans to this largely forgotten corner of gaming. There's also the fact that these games remain one of the best ways to couch co-op with a friend, which *River City Girls*' feisty heroines and their dynamite dynamic cater for with style.

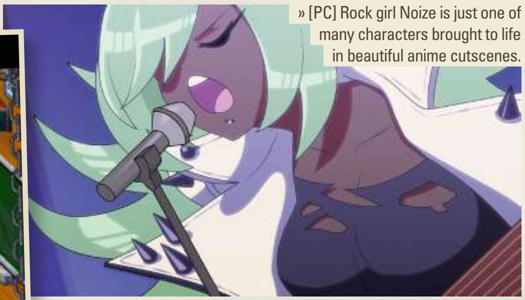
THE GAME

The chaotic good driving forces behind the game are Kyoko and Misako, who are searching the titular city for their kidnapped boyfriends – and series' usual frontmen – Riki and Kunio. They're a compelling pair, with Kyoko's ditsy cutesiness bouncing effortlessly off Misako's brusque tomboy charms during their encounters with the city's colourful denizens (which usually end in a scrap instigated by our love-crazed heroines).

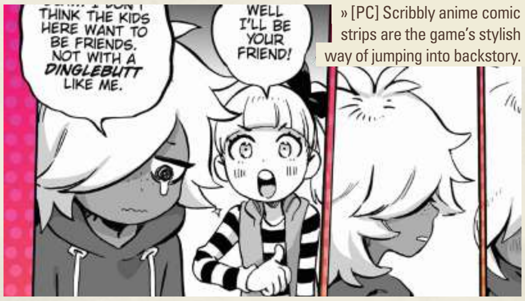
Each run-in with a school friend or boss, each visit to a shop or dojo, is something to look forward to – a flamboyant encounter written with the goofy comedic panache of a great anime series. The bin-dwelling Godai and eccentric emo boss Yamada are standouts, but really every bit of dialogue and accompanying hand-drawn anime characters are something to relish rather than skip past (and how many other beat-'em-ups can you really say that about?). Naturally, you spend most of the game fighting your way through



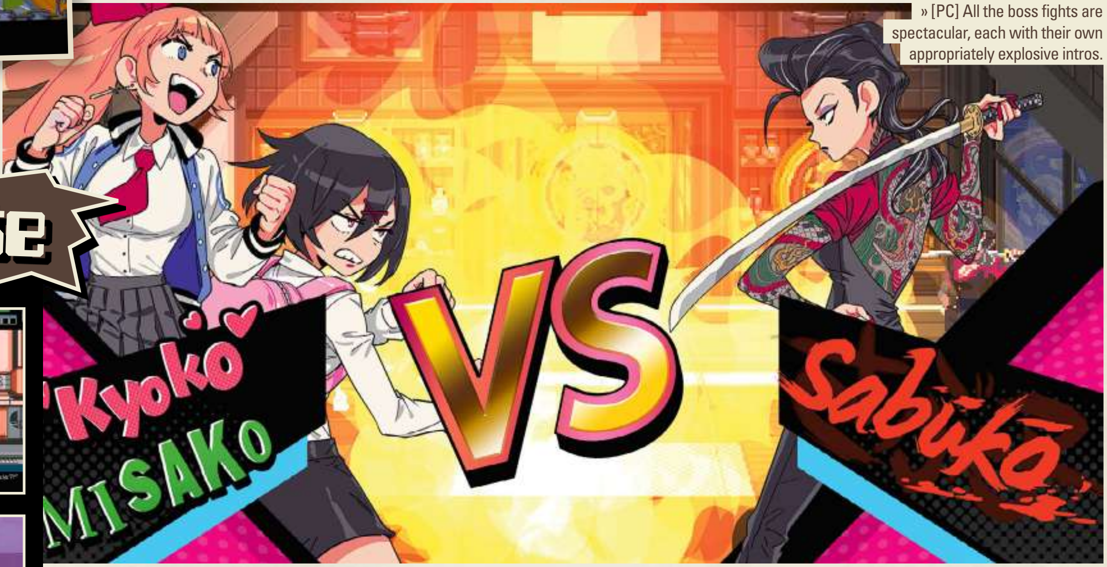
» [PC] Environments are lively and detailed, full of background characters, moving parts and quips.



» [PC] Rock girl Noize is just one of many characters brought to life in beautiful anime cutscenes.


THINK THE KIDS HERE WANT TO BE FRIENDS. NOT WITH A DINGLEBUTT LIKE ME.
WELL I'LL BE YOUR FRIEND!

» [PC] Scribbly anime comic strips are the game's stylish way of jumping into backstory.



» [PC] All the boss fights are spectacular, each with their own appropriately explosive intros.

Things of note

GOING UNDERGROUND

Another solid recent outing for River City, *Underground* is the best way to play the series in its traditional 8-bit style.

MEGAN MCDUFFEE

The voice behind *River City Girls'* vocal tracks is a prolific composer of cyberpunk, synthpop and other hypnotic soundscapes. Check out her music!

UNLIKELY SAVIOUR

WayForward joined Koji Igarashi's studio 505 Games late in development to complete *Bloodstained: Ritual Of The Night*, quite possibly saving the project.

UPCOMING PREQUEL?

River City GIRLS

In July 2020, WayForward announced a new *River City Girls* game, expected to be a prequel. No further details have been revealed yet.

KUNIO-TACHI NO BANKA

Misako and Kyoko have a storied history with the *River City* series, and were playable characters in this 1992 SNES entry that was only released in Japan.

the rowdy streets of River City, exploring its distinct areas with the help of a map and pummelling (almost) everyone in sight using a repertoire of combos that expands as you spend your hard-fought money. You have a choice about which moves to buy, and perishable foods that you purchase in shops have the added benefit of permanently boosting stats. As with the original game, it's not the most transparent upgrade system, but still gives you some welcome agency over your character, which is amplified by the girls' visually distinct movesets.

The combos and other power moves you pick up along the way are marginally more complex than in your average beat-'em-up, but there's no pressure to memorise all of them, as improvised chains of kicks and punches, as well as an assortment of swingable and throwable weapons can be effectively combined to stunlock your enemies into oblivion (though with the high density of enemies on-screen, you need to keep doing that elusive up-down moonwalk to ensure they don't do the same to you).

Your fist-swinging, high-kicking romp through River City is punctuated by a punchy soundtrack, which includes some dreamy vocal tracks by synthwave singer Megan McDuffee. Inevitably, all these stylistic flourishes mean that the game doesn't look or sound like the original *River City Ransom* or its rudimentary follow-ups, but acts as a gleaming tribute to it. It's appropriate that this is the first mainline series game to omit the 'Ransom' from the title, because *River City Girls* breaks aways from its series' rigid stylings to create something that *feels* true to the past but presents like a modern game whose developers had a lot of fun making it.

There's definitely something to be said for Japanese publisher Arc System Works handing development over to WayForward, an American studio with a track record of forward-thinking pixel-based games (*Shantae* series) and collaborating with Japanese studios looking to tap into the indie scene (*Bloodstained: Ritual Of The Night*). While recent *River City* games developed in-house have tried to capitalise on popular trends like battle royales and party game mashups, the entries outsourced to Western studios have given new angles on the series' seminal origins. *River City Girls* feels fresh, like it's been made by talented fans rather than publishers trying to cash in on a tiring IP.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

River City Girls parodies arcade beat-'em-ups and celebrates them at the same time. Does it move the genre forward? Not really, but then this is a genre that thrives on its connection with the past, taking us back to a certain time and place through the comforts of modern design ideas. Not that *River City Girls* is stuck in the past – it solidifies the series' best ideas, polishes the mechanics and imbues River City with a personality and vibrancy that it's long needed.

It's great to hear that WayForward looks like it's going to run with the *River City* IP for a few games, because in its hands – and with this fresh pair of female leads – the series can be revived. *River City Girls* is a shining example of how to make a forgotten franchise relevant again: identify what makes the series great, don't be ensnared by the weaker trappings of the past, and (in the absence of one in the first place) don't be afraid to flip the script. *

TAITO
DEMONSTRATION
GLASSJAW
gj3

» Brian in his Tokyo home, which he shares with a beautiful Egret3 arcade cabinet.

> “I phoned Ocean, pretending to be my careers teacher, saying I had a very talented pupil called Brian Flanagan…”
>
> Brian Flanagan

In the chair with...

BRIAN FLANAGAN

Brian Flanagan sailed the Ocean and ended up on Japanese shores, via Miami Beach. He tells us about pixel art, going to the Core and his journey to Japan

Words by Paul Drury

Living far away from the coast, Brian's story is truly one about following your dream. As a local lad, he set his sights on Manchester's preeminent software house Ocean and managed to land a job as an artist there, just as the company was moving from home micros to the new 16-bit consoles. He applied his talents to big licences, such as *Total Recall* and *The Addams Family*, and created striking visuals across a range of computers, consoles and handhelds, first at Ocean and later at Core Design and Warthog. He left the UK in the Noughties and has been making games in Japan for over a decade, embracing all aspects of the country's culture. "If you work in Japan, you will go to karaoke bars," he laughs. "My go-to song is the rap from a robot anime series called *Gurren Lagann*. It has a really cool call-back so everyone can join in. In Japanese culture, you do things together. It's all about the group."

You're based in Japan now, Brian, but you started out in Manchester, England. We once interviewed a chap called Ian Grieve who argued Britain and Japan had a shared history of bedroom coding due to the proliferation of home computers in the Eighties and the rainy weather which kept kids indoors.

Ah, I used to work with Ian at Warthog. We have a rainy season here in Japan but that only lasts about two-and-a-half weeks and the rest of the time the weather is great! I'd agree there is a culture of bedroom coding over here and there were companies back then who would publish games people had written on their own, like Ocean did in the UK. Not so much nowadays, though. Things have changed and got a lot more serious and corporate.

Were you a bedroom coder back in the Eighties?

I was a bedroom pixel-pusher, without a doubt. Ever since seeing *Space Invaders* in the Seventies, I wanted to make games and there was nothing that was going to stop me. I was drawing graphics on graph paper long before I actually got a computer. I was prepping for when my dad finally got me a Commodore 64 in 1987, when I was 15.

How did you break into the games business?

We had work experience at school and I kept hassling my careers teacher to get me into Ocean. They said they had a placement where I could repair buses. God, no. So I took the initiative and phoned Ocean, pretending to be the careers teacher, saying I had a very talented pupil called Brian Flanagan, very into videogames.

And it worked?

Yeah, that got me in. I arrived at 6 Central Street for my first day and saw this very tall guy, with bleached blonde hair and an Ocean bag, and I thought 'Oh God, that's the coolest guy ever. I want to be him!' Turned out it was Simon Butler.

» Brian (left) with fellow Ocean graphic artist Ste Thompson, at the ECTS show in 1989.

Ah, one of Ocean's graphic artists.

I was there a week, mainly just watching people working. Imagine having this teenager next to you, just staring. I probably started pissing a few people off. I went back the next summer, even though I was now in the sixth form and you weren't supposed to. Steve Wahid, the graphics manager at the time, had me do a few bits on the C64 version of *Operation Wolf*. I did one of the kids that run across the screen and you're not supposed to shoot.

But we all did.

Yeah! I had some abortive attempts doing the larger sprites. Remember, I was still only 17 and the only graphics work I'd done was in my bedroom, with no professional software, just *Garry Kitchen's GameMaker* to do animations. This was my first real experience.

Did this lead to you landing a proper job at Ocean?

Yes, I left college at the end of my first year and started at Ocean in July, 1989.

SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES

- **OPERATION THUNDERBOLT** [1990] C64
- **TOTAL RECALL** [1991] AMIGA/ ATARI ST
- **THE ADDAMS FAMILY** [1992] GAME BOY
- **PANG!** [1993] GAME BOY
- **ROBOCOP 2** [UNRELEASED] NES
- **THE UNTOUCHABLES** [1994] SNES
- **THE SHADOW** [UNRELEASED] SNES
- **FIGHTING FORCE** [1997] PLAYSTATION/N64
- **SILVER** [1999] PC/DREAMCAST
- **STARLANCER** [2000] PC/DREAMCAST
- **ASTERIX: THE GALLIC WARS** [2000] PLAYSTATION/PC
- **TOM AND JERRY IN MOUSE ATTACKS!** [2000] GBC
- **TINY TOONS: BUSTER SAVES THE DAY** [2001] GBC
- **PINKY AND THE BRAIN** [2002] GBA
- **ROBOT WARS: EXTREME DESTRUCTION** [2002] GBA
- **STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3** [2002] GBA
- **TENCHU: WRATH OF HEAVEN** [2003] MOBILE
- **MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT** [2004] PC
- **MARK ECKO'S GETTING UP** [2005] MOBILE
- **ROCK 'N' ROLL CLIMBER** [2009] WII
- **BATMAN: THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD** [2010] 3DS
- **BLACK EYES PEAS EXPERIENCE** [2011] XBOX 360
- **DEMON'S SCORE** [2012] MOBILE
- **OOKIBLOKS** [2013] MOBILE/PC
- **INITIAL D** [2014] 3DS
- **JUST SING** [2016] PS4/MOBILE
- **NARUTO TO BORUTO: SHINOBI STRIKERS** [2018] PS4/ XBOX ONE
- **DODONPACHI SAIDAIOUJOU EXA LABEL** [2021] ARCADE
- **SARU KANI PANIC** [2021] NES

Were you at all starstruck, now you were working alongside your gaming heroes?
The first person I wanted to meet was Steve Thompson. The guy is a legend in pixel art, still to this day. His work is so amazingly photo realistic, like his loading screens for *RoboCop* and *Navy Seals*. Back then, in the Compunet demo days, people would debate whether his work was digitised. It wasn't – he was just mind-blowingly good. The first thing I said when I met him was [puts on gormless voice] 'Is your work digitised?' He rolled his eyes, like 'Here we go again…'

Your first credited game was *Operation Thunderbolt*, which you did the graphics for not once but twice. What happened there?
I've had many long internal dialogues about this. Ocean put a programmer on the game with no track record, who went pretty much unsupervised for a very long time. Then you have me, with no industry experience, thrown onto the project. I don't think that's the best way to handle noobs. Yes, there were a lot of recreational combustibles consumed at lunchtimes but people could've seen things were going wrong a lot sooner [than they did].

There was a point when someone did eventually intervene?
I could see things were getting tense. The dev staff at Ocean weren't very kind. If your work sucked, someone would say something. To your face. That's a good thing – it pushes you to do better. Paul Hughes was legendary for walking round the office saying [in high-pitched Scouse accent] 'Eee! It's fucking shite!'

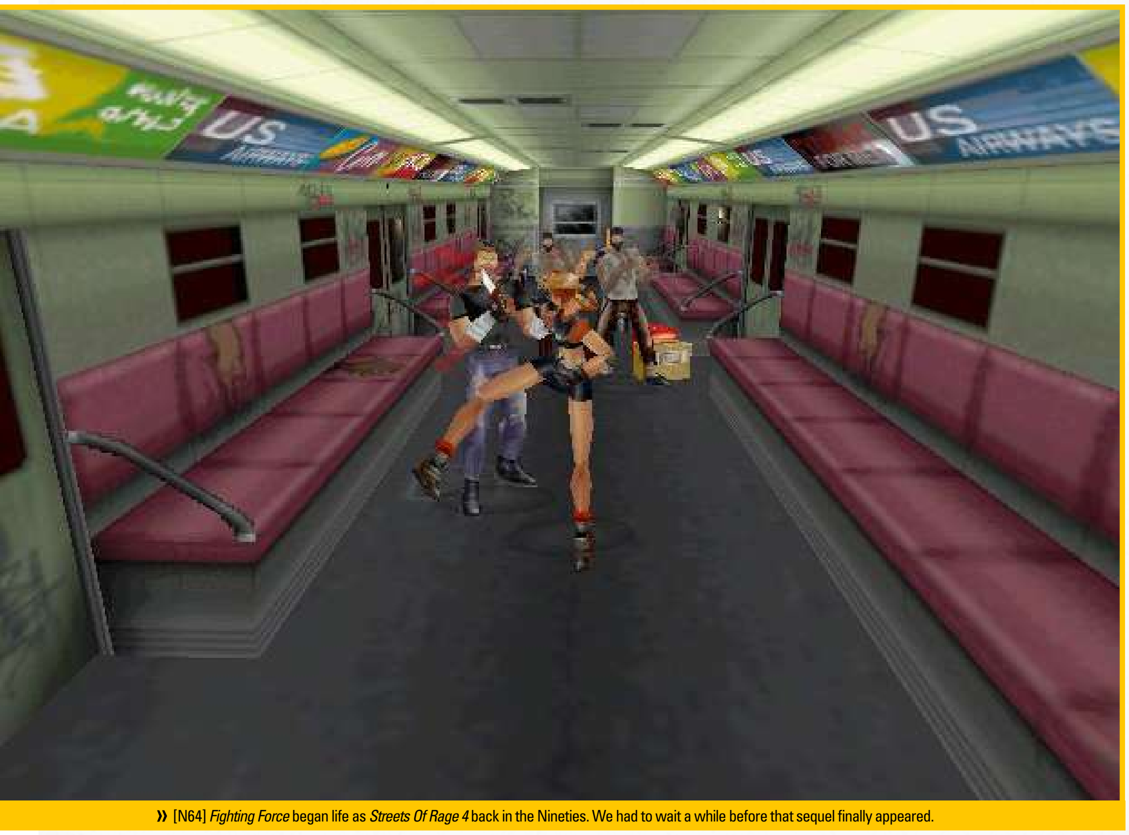
Paul and John Meegan stepped in to handle the coding, you redid the graphics and at least *Operation Thunderbolt* was released.
Yeah and it was alright. Obviously if we'd been working on it from the get go, it would've been a hell of a lot better, but you can't blame the weed intake. I'm not mentioning any names but Ocean's best programmer was a massive pothead.

That title was for the C64 but then you move up to the Amiga and Atari ST for *Total Recall*. Was that like having worked in crayons, you're suddenly given a paint box full of oils?
Oh God, yeah. All the techniques I'd seen used by people like Robert Hemphill, who was the king of 16-bit graphics at Ocean… I could look at his stuff and really push myself out of my comfort zone. I was happy with how my backgrounds turned out on that game.

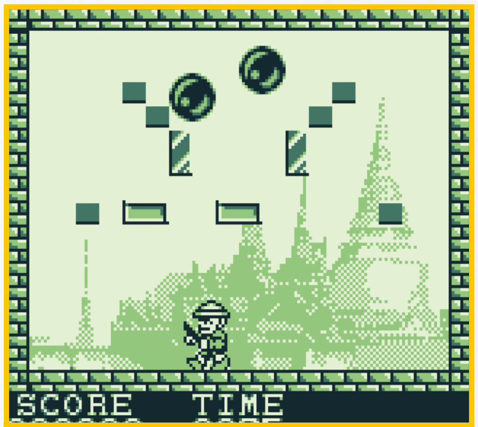
Tell us about your artistic background. Had you studied art at A-level?
No and I'll admit, I'm not very good on paper. It's been a curse for me over the years. In Japan, you're tested in every practical form before you can be part of game development. Artists will have to take an entrance exam and will be asked to draw. Musicians will be asked to play the piano!

But not in Manchester in 1990…
[Laughs] Yeah, but back then things were very small, so you didn't have to be a figure artist to animate a sprite. Loading screens were different, but Ocean had people like Steve Thompson and Mark Jones to do them and they were way better than me.

Ocean was well known for film licences and you worked on several, including *The Addams Family* and *The Untouchables*. Were you given source material to work from with those projects?
You might get source material if you were lucky. Sometimes, you'd only get a script. With *The Untouchables*, I was called in to do stuff on the SNES version, which was based on the C64 version, I think, and I was asked to 'console-ify' it. I was a huge console nut by then. I was all about the PC Engine and Nintendo. That was where my 'Japanese game nerd' [persona] started.



» [N64] *Fighting Force* began life as *Streets Of Rage 4* back in the Nineties. We had to wait a while before that sequel finally appeared.



» [GB] Brian did a fine job of cramming *Pang!* onto the monochrome screen of Nintendo's handheld.

Can it be restrictive when working with established IP?
Yeah, for sure. You're not just dealing with the limitations of the script; this is Hollywood, so there are lots of egos. The producer is the intermediary between the film studio and the game studio and I know for *Lethal Weapon* on the SNES, the producer asked if Ocean could put a hair salon in the background of one of the stages. We said okay and then she asked if it could be called 'Jenny's Hair Salon'. This producer was basically creating a plug for her fucking friend's business!

You also worked on an unreleased version of *RoboCop 2* for the NES. How far did that project get?
Not that far. We were basically doing background mock-ups and sprites. I really wanted to work on that game. It was my first NES game, Steve Thompson was my hero and I really liked the arcade game… I did some cool looking sprites and we had devkits but alas, all of a sudden, we were just told to stop. And I don't know why. The project went to Painting by Design, instead.

You worked on a range of Nintendo hardware at Ocean, including the Game Boy, NES and SNES. Did each platform need a different mindset?
Personally, I found it really easy to switch. There's a hard and fast rule set for each machine. I was a huge Japanese console nerd by this point so I was asking for the hardware documentation, particularly for the SNES. I was aware of all these things it could do, like Mode 7, effect masks and different layers and colour [palettes] and I wanted to know how it was all done so if I was planning something out, I could do it correctly and not give the programmer any hassle.

You were investigating the technical capabilities of your 'canvas'. Was that typical of artists?
I don't think so. I was just a massive, raging nerd.

We really liked your version of *Pang!* on the Game Boy. You did well to squeeze the game onto the small screen of the handheld.
I didn't just do the graphics for that, I had to redesign every stage [to fit]. I'd look at the original layout and redraw it on graph paper. I always wanted to be a game designer… and also do the music!

Did Ocean allow this or were you supposed to 'stay in your lane' as an artist?
No and it got to a point where I wasn't only doing design, I'd be doing production work as well. At that point, we didn't have art directors or producers, so I became the guy who would design a game because no one else was doing that. I even wrote game manuals!

We have heard some pretty wild stories of what it was like to work at Ocean in the Eighties. Was it becoming more professional by the Nineties?
I was there during the crossover between 8-bit and 16-bit and things were getting more serious. The Japanese companies like Taito, Konami and Capcom, they'd been doing much more technically competent work in the arcades for years and it was like we were ambling over this very rickety bridge from 8-bit land to 16-bit land. There was a lot of stabbing in the dark.

Not literally, we hope
Nah, but it could still be just as chaotic. There's video footage of the secret NES development building and all you can hear is Eighties rock blaring out of Bill Harbison's [artist at Ocean]

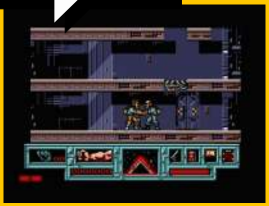
▶

» Brian at Warthog in 2000, with his trusty fighting stick at his side.

> "I arrived at Ocean and saw this very tall guy, with bleached blonde hair and an Ocean bag, and I thought 'Oh God, that's the coolest guy ever. I want to be him!'"
> Brian Flanagan

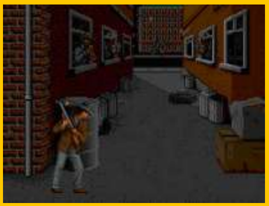
FIVE TO PLAY

Great titles Brian has been involved with



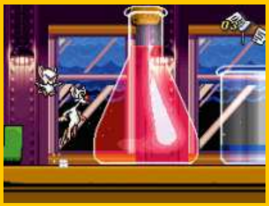
TOTAL RECALL

■ Though he would make his name working on Nintendo consoles, Brian started his time at Ocean producing art for the home micros and this film tie-in for the Amiga and ST provides some entertaining leaping and blasting. The 'minivan versus tank' road battle still makes us smile quite a bit.



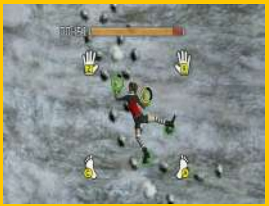
THE UNTOUCHABLES

■ Another film licence from Ocean but one handled with a confidence that comes with practice. The shoot-out scenes have you dispatching swathes of gangsters with both barrels before taking on the mob in side-scrolling and top-down sections. It can be repetitive at times, but it has nice period detail throughout.



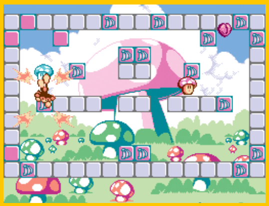
PINKY AND THE BRAIN

■ An excellent showcase for Brian's skills as a pixel artist, this colourful cartoon licence combines collect-it-all platforming, run-and-gun blasting and even some scrolling shoot-'em-up sections. The GBA is not short of such games but this one is a fine example of the strengths of Nintendo's handheld.



ROCK 'N' ROLL CLIMBER

■ Brian names this as a particular favourite of the scores of games he's worked on over his long career. Cleverly using the Wiimote and Nunchuk controllers to represent your hands and the Balance Board your feet, intrepid virtual mountaineers can scale great heights and celebrate with a guitar solo at the summit.



SARU KANI PANIC

■ Building on his previous PC and mobile title *OokiBloks*, Brian's latest project takes a Japanese legend about a war between monkeys and crabs as the basis for some cute yet fiendish puzzling. Due for a physical release on the NES this year, you can follow his progress on Twitter @Work3studio.

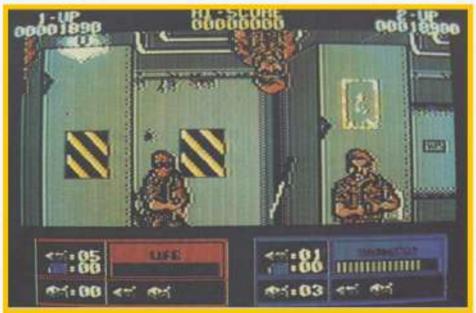
room. It was fucking chaos that place. We were unsupervised, it was loud as hell, people coming and going… it was pretty lawless.

It sounds fun but did you get the work done, too?

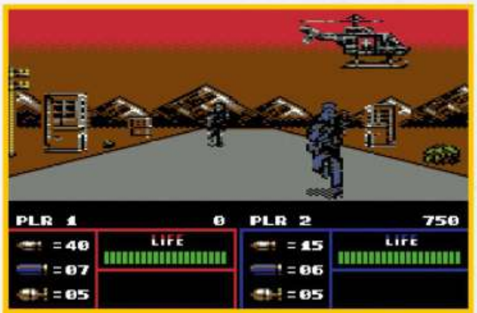
You had to. You didn't have a choice. You had a product to make and if that didn't happen, Gary [Bracey – software manager at Ocean] was going to come down on you like a ton of bricks. You had to get shit done.

You left Ocean in 1997. What prompted that move?

I didn't leave – I was laid off along with half the dev staff. It was when Infogrames bought Ocean, though to be honest, I know I'd been treading on people's toes because I had a clear idea of how console games should be done. Like, *The Green Lantern* for the SNES, which never came out… that still had a huge panel for the score, like with the old 8-bit titles. Those panels were basically used to reduce raster time because you didn't have to update that big part [of the screen] and I was like 'Guys, we don't need to do this anymore and the competition isn't doing it.' I wanted to help but I was pissing people off.



» Screenshots for the scrapped version of *Operation Thunderbolt* did appear in magazines. Spliff not shown.



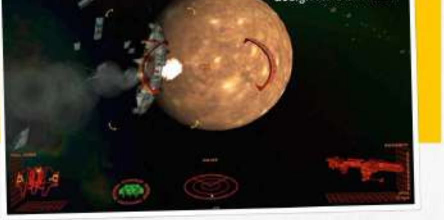
» [C64] *Operation Thunderbolt* was Brian's first published title and required him to take two shots at the target…

You joined Core Design in Derby. Did you expect to be working on a *Tomb Raider* title?

That was my hope [laughs]. Core was right on the cusp of blowing up when I arrived but instead of working on a Lara Croft game, they said I would be working on *Streets Of Rage 4*.

STAR MAN

Though Brian spent much of his time at Warthog making handheld titles, we noticed he also contributed to the epic *Starlancer*, released for the PC and Dreamcast in 2000. "It was pure necessity," chuckles Brian. "They didn't have enough level designers, so basically anyone at Warthog with any kind of game design savvy was put on *Starlancer* as a mission designer… whether they could do it or not. It took me a good while to get my head around it but I really enjoyed it. You had a 3D level editor and scripting [tools] and you could set up cool camera angles, like how the Imperial Destroyer in *Star Wars* flies over the rebel ship: the camera angle is low, so the destroyer is huge and on top, so in film language that suggests dominance. It was awesome, like making my own little movie and I spotted one of the levels I designed, which had two ships broadsiding each other like an old school pirate battle, in the *Wing Commander* film! It's not a good film, but even so…"



» [Dreamcast] It was a question of all hands on deck when it came to mission design for *Starlancer*.

Really? Did they have the licence from Sega?

I was told they had by Adrian Smith [cofounder of Core Design]. I was a huge fan of the series on the Mega Drive. Yuzo Koshiro was my all-time videogame musician at that point and I was really into rave music, as well. It was ticking all my boxes. I was like '*Streets Of Rage 4*? Sign me the fuck up!' It did appear in one magazine under that title and I know Core were in talks with Sega but the Saturn wasn't doing so well and the PlayStation was blowing up, so unfortunately, it didn't happen.

The game was retitled *Fighting Force* and received 'mixed reviews', as the cliche goes.

It was a really good learning process for me. I'd joined Ocean aged 17 with no experience of pixel graphics and now I was joining another company aged 25 with no clue about 3D! I got to do polygon modelling, 3D animation and texturing. I worked my ass off on that game. Everyone did. The 3D toolset was miles better than at Ocean, who really didn't have much of a clue about 3D. And *Fighting Force* might have got mixed reviews but those royalty cheques were damn good.

You worked on both the N64 and the PlayStation releases. Did you prefer one console over the other?

Ah, I'm credited on the N64 version simply because my assets are used, but the thing with Core Design – they paid royalties. People realised they could make a fuck-ton of money if you got other people off a project so they could do more of [the game] and get a bigger slice of the royalties. For most of the time the N64 version was being made, I was sat on my arse playing *Final Fantasy VII*.

Nice work if you can get it. You left Core and after some work on *Asterix: The Gallic Wars*, you joined Warthog and ended up working on cartoon licences for Nintendo handhelds.

> "I was a huge Japanese game nerd. I was all about the PC Engine and Nintendo"
>
> Brian Flanagan

Having learned to do 3D modelling and texturing at Core, I was hoping that would continue at Warthog but the Game Boy Advance happened. That meant relatively quick projects to support the financing of the bigger, longer projects. It felt a bit like a return to Ocean days, with the licensing and these 2D games. It wasn't a problem because I was the lead guy and I do really like doing pixel graphics. However, it made a big difference to my career ever since because 3D pretty much passed me by.

Of the Game Boy Color and Game Boy Advance titles you worked on at Warthog, have you a favourite?

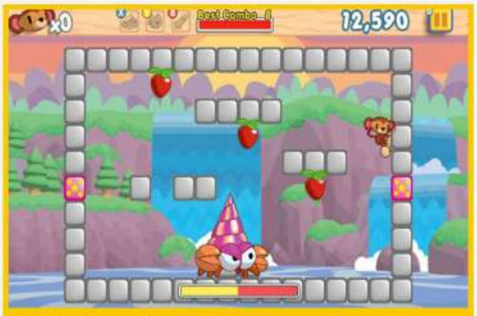
I'd say *Pinky And The Brain*. I put a lot of effort into the sprites, did a fair chunk of the backgrounds and worked with Tim Coupe, the programmer, to do some interesting, demo-scene style of effects in that game, like a cool rotating tunnel in one of the stages. We had a bit of time with that one – some of the games I did at Warthog were really, really rushed.

That was one of your final titles for Warthog before you leave the company and the UK.

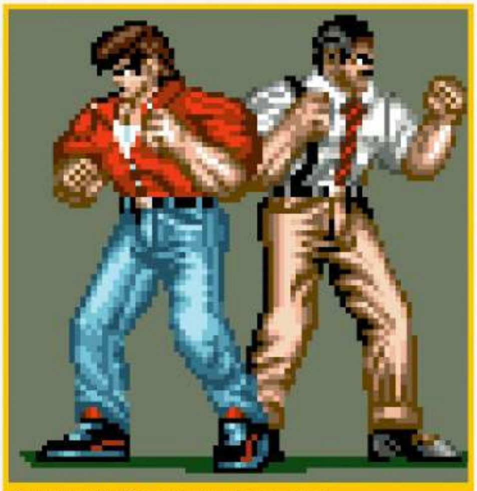
[Laughs] Yeah, while I was still at Warthog, I was doing sneaky stuff on the side, and one title I did was *Street Fighter Zero* on the GBA. Simon Butler got me that gig. I worshipped Capcom. I'd actually gone over to Japan for an interview [at the company] when I was at Ocean and now I was working on one of my dream games. It got me thinking – this was really what I wanted to be doing. John Romero's company, Monkeystone, got in touch because they wanted some GBA graphics doing for *Cartoon Network Block Party* and I was getting a bit disillusioned at Warthog. Actually, they were pissing me off.

How?

At the time, I was in an industrial techno band called Datathief. We were signed and we did a US tour – Miami, Ohio and Detroit – and I made lots of friends in America. After the tour, we were interviewed by magazines in Manchester and one of the managers at Warthog came over and said 'You know Brian, we probably own all your music.'



» Brian's cute puzzler *OkiBloks* provided the inspiration for his new NES game.



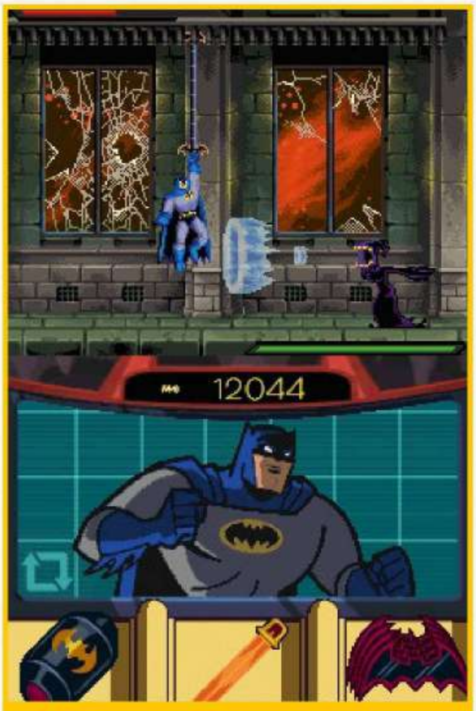
» A pixelated Mel Gibson and Danny Glover produced by Brian for *Lethal Weapon*.

Cheeky.
I was like 'No you fucking don't.' I had been talking to John Romero and I thought maybe it's time to move to America, so I went to live in Miami for six months, working my ass off all morning and spending the afternoon on the beach.

You spent several years in the USA, mainly producing mobile phone games, before moving across the Pacific to work on the Nintendo Wii title *Rock 'N' Roll Climber*.
I had been living in San Francisco and things weren't going so well with my girlfriend. I needed to move out and I saw a job ad for working on Nintendo titles in Kyoto, Japan. I got in touch with this guy called Giles Goddard, who did the rubbery face on *Mario 64* and worked on *Star Fox*. He's a legend. I did the UI and the music for *Rock 'N' Roll Climber* and that was my first music credit… but at the end of that project, all the foreign staff were laid off and I felt very lost.

Did you consider moving back to the UK?
I had actually bought a ticket to go home but then I was on the banks of the river that runs through Kyoto, which is very picturesque, quintessentially Japanese, very Zen and I just thought 'No, I'm not letting this go.'

Perhaps you thought of the Manchester ship canal?
Yeah, there was that kind of juxtaposition in my head! I really didn't want to go back to England. I felt I'd come this far and I didn't want the journey to end, so I got a student visa and spent a year learning Japanese. Then a little bit of magic happened. I was a big fan of the DS game *Ouendan* [spiritual predecessor of *Elite Beat Agents*] so I applied to iNiS, the company that produced it, and they offered me a job five days before my visa expired.



» [3DS] *Batman: The Brave And The Bold* saw Brian creating excellent graphics for both screens of the 3DS.

6000
SHIN AKUMA
GUARD
GUARD
CHARLIE
A-ISM
X-ISM
GO!
SUPER
CHARGE
OK

» [GBA] Despite its size, *Street Fighter Alpha 3* still packs a punch on the GBA.

You now live in Tokyo so does that mean you spend your time hanging out in Akihabara, the famous gaming district of the city?
I do love my retro stuff and do buy a lot, but Akihabara is overpriced. I still go there, though, because now I'm involved in the arcade business. I'm working for a start-up called Exa Arcadia and I've just finished work on *Dodonpachi Saidaioujou Exa Label*, a new game in the series. It's arcade only and is out on location test as we speak.

You're living your 'Japanese game nerd' dream!
[laughs] I love my shooters and the people I work for trust and respect me. I'm also making my own NES game, *Saru Kani Panic*. I've done the design, graphics and music, my friend Jesse Lampert has done the coding and I'm even going to manufacture the cartridges myself. So yeah, I'm super happy!

Thanks to Brian (@Work3studio) for use of his original images and Martyn Carroll for additional help.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Readers can get involved at www.retrogamer.net/forum

PSJ3809: What has been your favourite platform to work on?

Since I've been working on the NES, I'd say that is now my favourite. It has absolutely hundreds of great games made by great companies that still stand the test of time. I was playing *Ninja Gaiden III* last night! The amazing thing is that people are still making homebrew NES games, some with MP3 chips… it's getting a second lease of life.

MERMAN: How did you make pixel art on the original Game Boy work so well?

[Laughs] I don't know. I think if you understand basic pixel graphics, like on a Spectrum or a Game Boy, you recognise that limited palette. And you should always test your art on the actual hardware itself. Just doing it on a [computer] screen won't work. Test it on the actual Game Boy screen because that flickering does things!

GIENEKK: Which game you worked on gave you the most joy?

I like that question! I'd say *Rock 'N' Roll Climber* because I was in Japan, a place where I had always wanted to work, I was making the game for Nintendo, working closely with them, and I was doing the music as well. I always had a smile on my face. I was terrified at the same time, though!

ERIC: Did you start work on the cancelled Sega Saturn version of *Streets Of Rage 4*?

Yes. There was a demo disc that came out with the Saturn version on it a very long time ago but at that point, it wasn't going to be *Streets Of Rage 4* – it was already something else and apart from the female character, whose hair may have been changed, there was little to nothing in it from when it was going to be *Streets Of Rage*.

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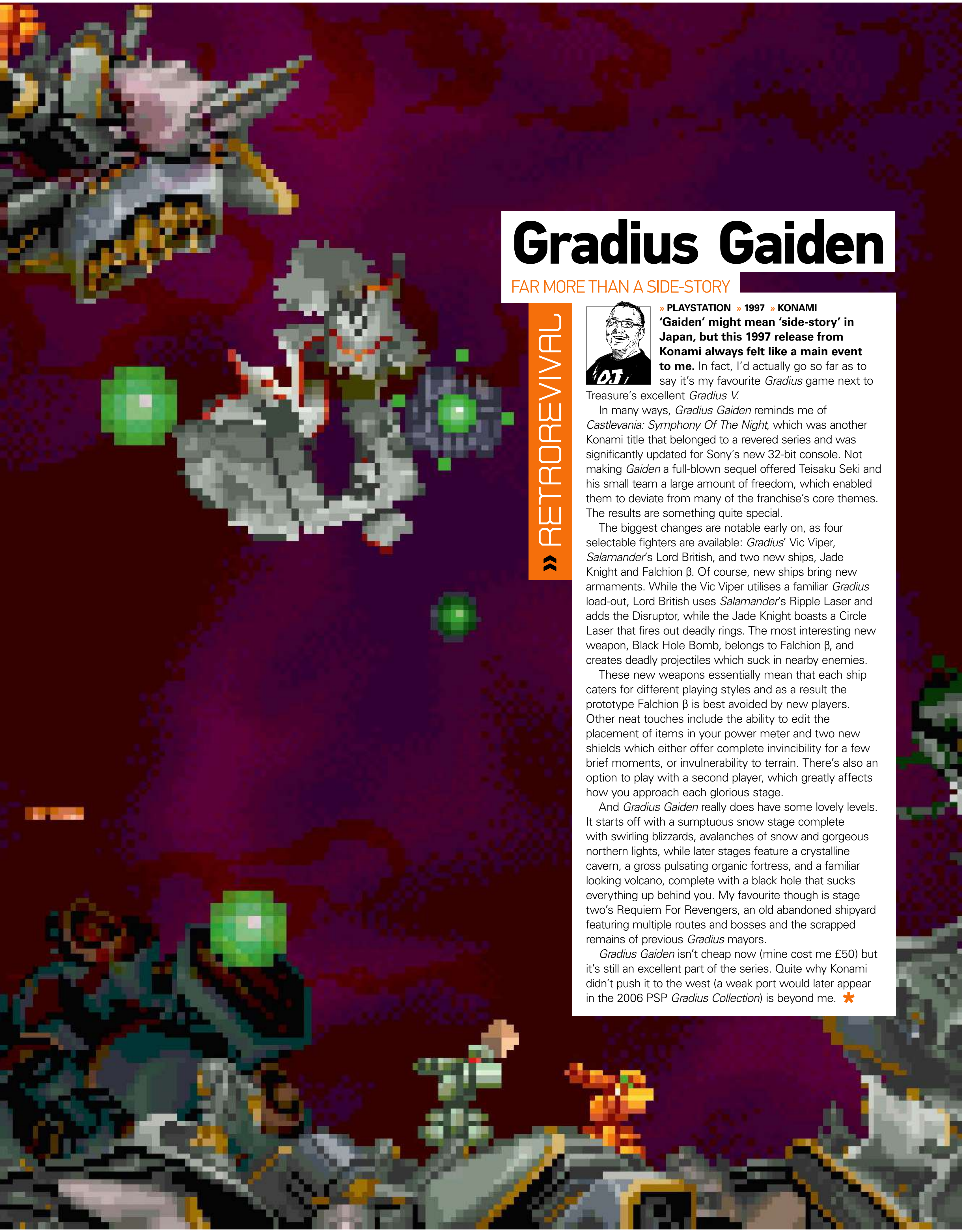


Gradius Gaiden

FAR MORE THAN A SIDE-STORY

» PLAYSTATION » 1997 » KONAMI

'Gaiden' might mean 'side-story' in Japan, but this 1997 release from Konami always felt like a main event to me. In fact, I'd actually go so far as to say it's my favourite *Gradius* game next to Treasure's excellent *Gradius V*.

In many ways, *Gradius Gaiden* reminds me of *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*, which was another Konami title that belonged to a revered series and was significantly updated for Sony's new 32-bit console. Not making *Gaiden* a full-blown sequel offered Teisaku Seki and his small team a large amount of freedom, which enabled them to deviate from many of the franchise's core themes. The results are something quite special.

The biggest changes are notable early on, as four selectable fighters are available: *Gradius*' Vic Viper, *Salamander*'s Lord British, and two new ships, Jade Knight and Falchion β. Of course, new ships bring new armaments. While the Vic Viper utilises a familiar *Gradius* load-out, Lord British uses *Salamander*'s Ripple Laser and adds the Disruptor, while the Jade Knight boasts a Circle Laser that fires out deadly rings. The most interesting new weapon, Black Hole Bomb, belongs to Falchion β, and creates deadly projectiles which suck in nearby enemies.

These new weapons essentially mean that each ship caters for different playing styles and as a result the prototype Falchion β is best avoided by new players. Other neat touches include the ability to edit the placement of items in your power meter and two new shields which either offer complete invincibility for a few brief moments, or invulnerability to terrain. There's also an option to play with a second player, which greatly affects how you approach each glorious stage.

And *Gradius Gaiden* really does have some lovely levels. It starts off with a sumptuous snow stage complete with swirling blizzards, avalanches of snow and gorgeous northern lights, while later stages feature a crystalline cavern, a gross pulsating organic fortress, and a familiar looking volcano, complete with a black hole that sucks everything up behind you. My favourite though is stage two's Requiem For Revengers, an old abandoned shipyard featuring multiple routes and bosses and the scrapped remains of previous *Gradius* mayors.

Gradius Gaiden isn't cheap now (mine cost me £50) but it's still an excellent part of the series. Quite why Konami didn't push it to the west (a weak port would later appear in the 2006 PSP *Gradius Collection*) is beyond me. ✱

RETRORATED

>> This month we've been enjoying Sega's latest mini system. We also look at a new Turrican compilation and Nick devours the latest Puyo Puyo Vs Tetris release

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

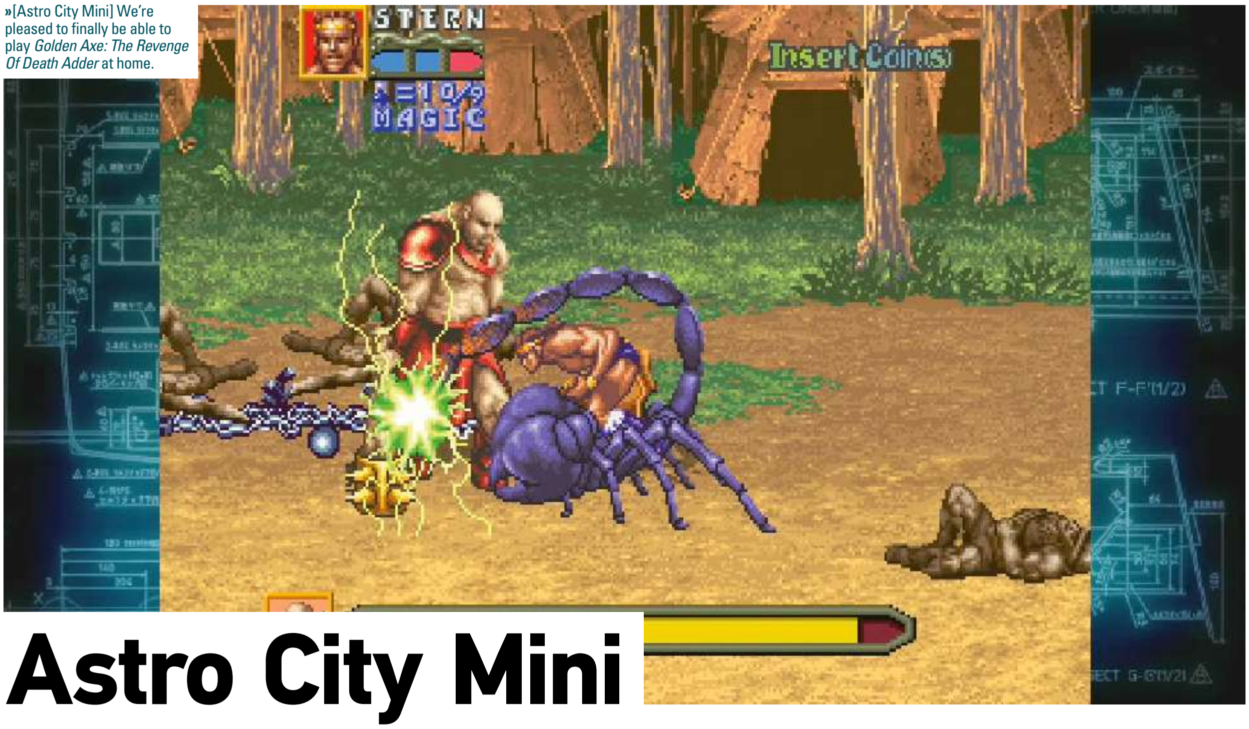
Astro City Mini

It wasn't cheap to import, but it's a great piece of kit and worth it for all the excellent System 32 games.

NICK

Puyo Puyo Tetris 2

There's not much difference in gameplay terms, but the formula still works and I've got fresh victims to beat online.



»[Astro City Mini] We're pleased to finally be able to play *Golden Axe: The Revenge Of Death Adder* at home.

Astro City Mini

MINI CABINET, MAJOR FUN

INFORMATION

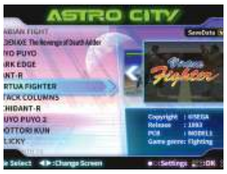
» **RELEASED:**
OUT NOW

» **PRICE:**
¥12,800 (£90 APPROX, EXCLUDING SHIPPING/TAX)

» **PUBLISHER:**
SEGA

» **DEVELOPER:**
SEGA TOYS

» **PLAYERS:**
1-2



»[Astro City Mini] The menu here is attractive and easy to navigate, though sorting options would have been nice.

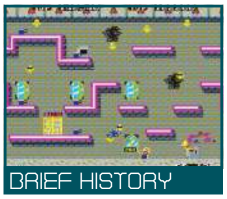
While fans were excitedly discussing which console might be chosen as the basis for a successor to the Mega Drive Mini, Sega swerved everyone last summer by choosing instead to focus on its arcade heritage. We were immediately excited by the prospect of it – the company has decades of hits to choose from, and the Astro City cabinet is a design classic. This enthusiasm was dampened a little when it became apparent that there's no plan to release the device outside of Japan, but we took the plunge and found that the Astro City Mini is interesting enough to justify a rare import review. For convenience, we bought from Amazon Japan, but a number of other stores carry it including Rakuten Books, Bic Camera and Yodobashi.

The Astro City Mini takes the form of a miniature arcade cabinet, similar to the Neo Geo Mini. Compared to SNK's machine, the Astro City Mini is a little larger and offers far better controls, as the joystick and buttons are all microswitched. While sharp and usable, the integrated display is not quite as impressive as it is 16:9 and therefore doesn't fit the bezel. Games also don't present quite as sharply, as they run at a variety of resolutions and scaling is always necessary. The integrated speakers are plenty loud, and a headphone jack is present if you prefer that option. The system is powered through a standard micro USB cable, and doesn't include a battery for portable play.

It's possible to connect the Astro City Mini to a TV, with a HDMI port offering 720p output. It's not possible to stretch the games to fill the full 16:9 display, but you do get a couple of wallpapers to choose from and there's an option to use scanlines. There's no filtering by default or as an option, so the image looks sharp but shimmering is visible during some games, particularly the few vertically-oriented games like *Gain Ground*. And unfortunately there's no tate mode for those vertical games, either.

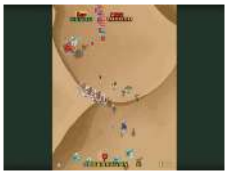
No matter which way you choose to play, you can connect up to two controllers via USB – if you only connect one, the integrated controls default to the other player. Arcade joysticks are available for ¥12,800, but we didn't try them owing to the cost, instead opting for the standard joypads at ¥2,780 (about £20). These feel a little cheap, but they're responsive and have held up during our testing.

Mercifully, the system offers you the chance to set the language to English on first boot, so you won't have any trouble navigating the attractive menu. Games are listed chronologically, with a few screenshots displayed and some basic information listed – and when you select a game, you're shown the controls and a basic synopsis, as well as any saved

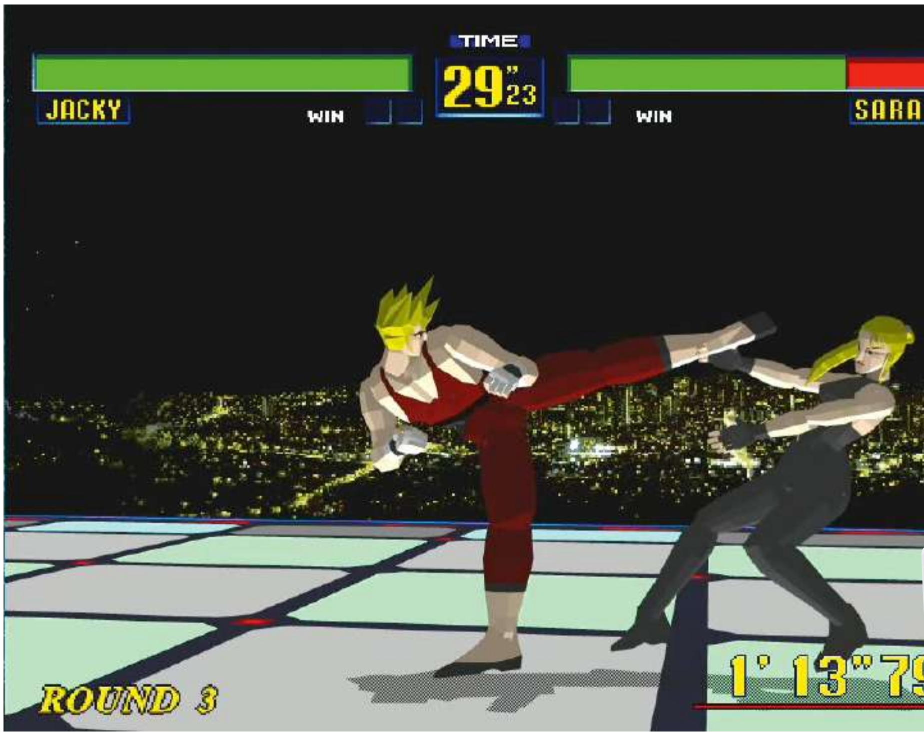


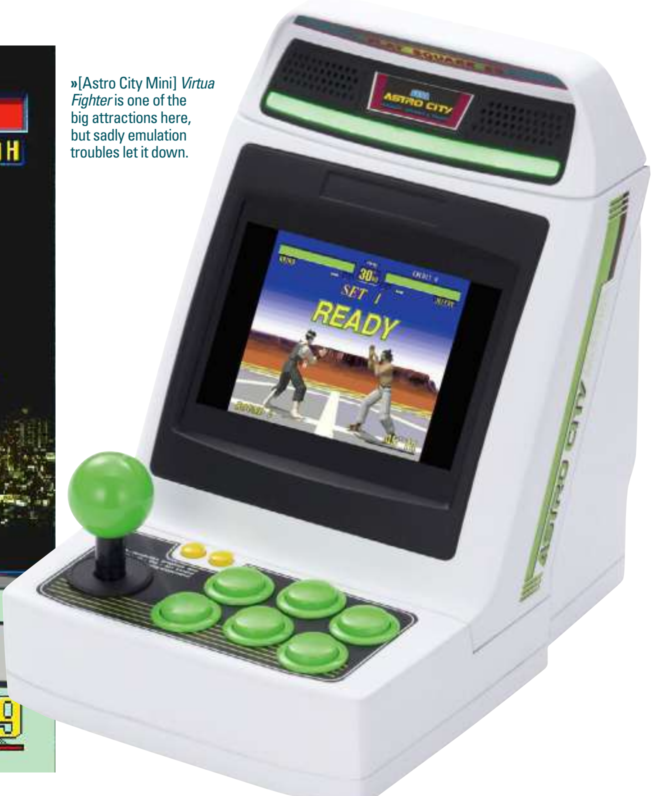
BRIEF HISTORY

» The original Astro City is an arcade cabinet introduced by Sega in 1993, and an example of the candy cabinet – the standard sit-down cabinets popular in Japanese arcades, as opposed to Western machines which are typically built to be played standing up. The Astro City is popular for its attractive design and large 29-inch screens, and was chosen as the representative model for Sega's arcade plug-and-play system as it is considered to be an iconic cabinet. Sega has chosen games released from 1984-1994 for this console, and has broadly stuck to those used in standard cabinets rather than its many deluxe cabinets.



»[Astro City Mini] Vertical games like *Sonic Boom* are presented with big borders that you can't get rid of.





»[Astro City Mini] *Virtua Fighter* is one of the big attractions here, but sadly emulation troubles let it down.

»[Astro City Mini] Scanlines are here, but often don't fit with a game's resolution and look strange as a result.

»[Astro City Mini] Despite Sega's strong heritage in racing games, *Rad Mobile* is the only racer to make the cut here.

»[Astro City Mini] *Shadow Dancer*'s arcade version is totally different to the Mega Drive game, and is good fun.

»[Astro City Mini] With three versions of *Columns* and two *Puyo Puyo* games, puzzle fans are well catered for.

states you have created (up to two per game). Of course, the star of any device like this is its games, and the Astro City Mini delivers a quality line-up of 37 games. If you were a Sega fan during the Master System years or the early days of the Mega Drive, the selection of games here is likely to provoke a strong nostalgia response as plenty of famous games are here, including *Shinobi*, *Golden Axe*, *Wonder Boy*, *Space Harrier*, *Fantasy Zone* and *Puyo Puyo*. The emulation is broadly good too. Games are responsive, visually correct and mostly sound correct, though there are rare occasions where distortion can creep in, which can usually be fixed by restarting the game.

But what's interesting here is that some of the games you might have expected to see here have been passed over in favour of deeper cuts. You won't find nostalgia package staples like *Out Run* and *After Burner*, but you do get the renowned cute-'em-up *Cotton* and the impressive sprite-scaling racer *Rad Mobile*. It's particularly great to be able to play *Golden Axe: The Revenge Of Death Adder*, which has never previously had a home release, as well as games like *Shadow Dancer* and *Cyber Police ESWAT* which were essentially remade for the Mega Drive. There are duds, as with any collection – did we really need *Columns II*? – but overall leaving those big deluxe cabinet games out hasn't adversely affected the quality of the console.

However, there are a couple of games with major problems. Firstly, *Quartet 2* suffers from a long-standing emulation bug that causes some platforms not to appear, making it harder if not outright impossible. Secondly, *Virtua Fighter* has received a nice resolution boost but suffers from some performance problems – dropped frames are often seen in replays, and input lag is very noticeable to the point that it may ruin the experience for some players. We do have some other complaints, but they're less major – for example, some games could have supported four players via a USB hub but have instead been included in their two-player forms, and access to dip switches and service menus would have been nice. All games are the Japanese versions for obvious reasons, and while this doesn't matter for most games it does extend to important instructions in games like *Ichidant-R*.

Those problems ultimately put the Astro City Mini a step behind the best plug-and-play systems, but it's not a tremendous gap. Overall, it's a very good way to enjoy a variety of arcade classics, particularly if you're a fan of beat-'em-ups, shoot-'em-ups, run-and-guns, and puzzle games. ✱

In a nutshell

This well constructed miniature cabinet doesn't quite maintain the quality of the Mega Drive Mini, but does justice to plenty of great games that serve as a reminder of how Sega became such an arcade titan.

»[Astro City Mini] Games like *Wonder Boy In Monster Land* will prove more challenging without English text.

RETRO ROUNDUP

WE LOOK AT THE LATEST RETRO-RELATED RELEASES

✱ PICK OF THE MONTH

Turrican Flashback

» Buy it from: Switch (tested), PS4 **» Buy it for:** £24.99 **» Buy it from:** Retail, online

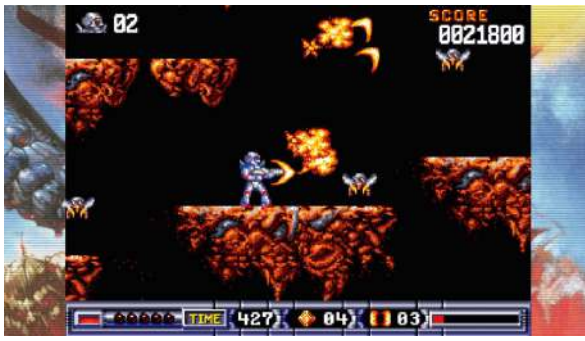
It's not often we get to see a home computer classic revived for modern consoles, but *Turrican Flashback* does the job well. Four games have been included in this compilation: the Amiga versions of *Turrican* and *Turrican II*, plus the console games *Mega Turrican* and *Super Turrican*. Though this may seem like a small amount of games for the price, they're difficult and will last you a while, and the console ones are pretty expensive these days. The control schemes have also been reworked to take advantage of the many buttons of a modern controller, which is particularly great news for the Amiga games designed around one-button joysticks.

We didn't spot any emulation errors, and that's only the start of the good news on that front. The game goes beyond the standard save state options to allow for instant rewinding, which is very handy given how tough these games can be. Better yet, the CRT filter options are arguably the most comprehensive we've seen in an official retro bundle so far – you can change every aspect from the grille style and curvature to the effect intensity and gamma.

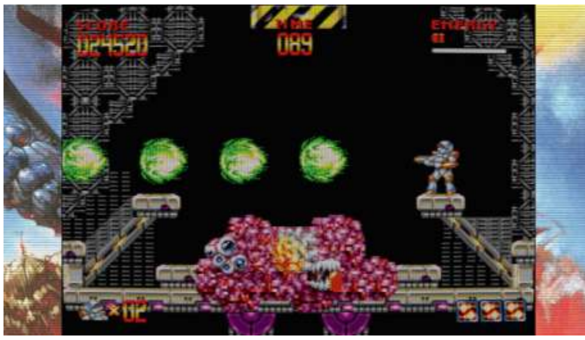
The problems with *Turrican Flashback* are mostly to do with things that *aren't* there, particularly when compared to the two limited edition *Turrican Anthology* packages. The director's cut versions of all the console games included in those are missing, and more egregiously, so is *Super Turrican 2*. Going beyond that, we still would have liked to have seen the original Commodore 64 versions of the first two games, and you won't find much in the way of extras.

Turrican Flashback compiles some true greats into an affordable and well-produced package, so we'd still recommend it to anyone with an interest in the series. But we can't deny that we're disappointed that it comes so close to being a definitive collection, only to fail at the simple task of delivering the complete line-up that would have sealed the deal for us.

>> Score **77%**



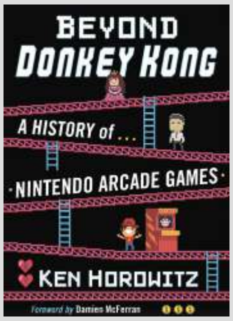
»[Switch] With more buttons, it's now possible to use alternate weapons much more easily than on the Amiga.



»[Switch] The CRT filter here is highly customisable and goes far beyond most compilations – good work!

Beyond Donkey Kong: A History Of... Nintendo Arcade Games

» Buy it from: amazon.co.uk **» Buy it for:** £35.44



This has been out for a while, but overseas post has delayed it for us. The wait has been worth it, as Ken Horowitz's latest book is another excellent tome that this time focuses on the impact Nintendo had in the arcades during the early Eighties. While it inevitably looks at the gigantic success of *Donkey Kong*, Ken remembers that there was more to the Kyoto-based giant than just Miyamoto's hit. His book not only charts the early rise of Nintendo, but also discusses systems like the Color TV-Game 6, *Sheriff* and the company's overall legacy. As you'd expect from Ken's previous books, his latest has been extensively researched and is brimming with interesting anecdotes and fascinating facts. The lack of colour photography seems at odds with the high price, but it doesn't stop it from being an enjoyable read.

Puyo Puyo Tetris 2

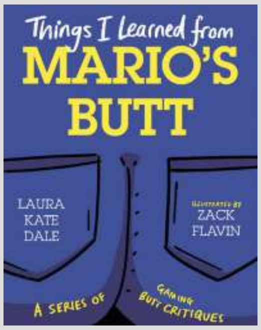
» System: Switch, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X, PC **» Buy it from:** Retail, online **» Buy it for:** £34.99

If you enjoyed the original *Puyo Puyo Tetris*, you'll probably enjoy this sequel because very little about it has changed. The primary addition is the new Skill Battle mode, which allows you to create and level up an RPG-style party of three, each with their own unique special abilities. This works well enough, but the addition of a health bar means that you can be defeated without topping out, which feels a bit wrong. Beyond that there's a new story in Adventure mode, and some refinements to online play including new co-op boss raids and options to stick exclusively to *Tetris* or *Puyo Puyo*. For general players, it's still great and comes recommended, but if you already own the first, don't consider upgrading unless you're a super fan or online fanatic.

>> Score **80%**

Things I learned From Mario's Butt

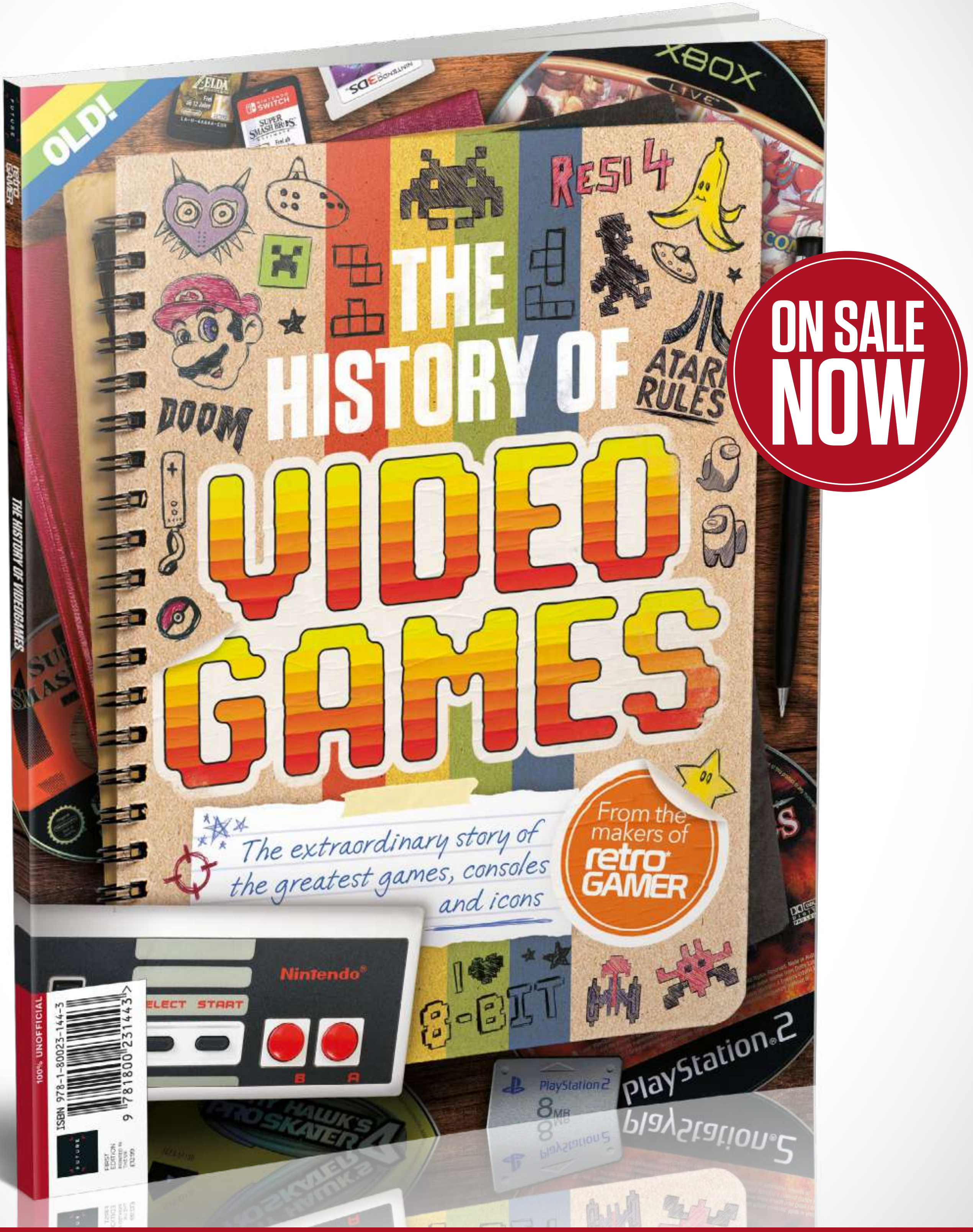
» Buy it from: unbound.com **» Buy it for:** £25



Laura Kate Dale's latest book is rather lighthearted, but it's proven to be a good tonic for the latest lockdown. While the bottoms of many modern videogame heroes are covered, including Tracer, Widowmaker, Papyrus and Spider-Man, there are plenty of bums from retro characters to enjoy, too. It's very fluffy in places with some terribly corny jokes "Ohhh, Nathan Drake's arse – now that's some uncharted territory worth exploring", but it still managed to make us smile in what has been a difficult month. It's complemented by some interesting insight from the likes of Mike Bithell and mini critiques from a number of notable videogame personalities, including Jim Sterling. Lastly there's some absolutely lovely artwork from Zack Flavin, cleverly celebrating classic characters from a whole different angle.

TAKE A JOURNEY THOUGH VIDEOGAMING HISTORY

From the formative experiments of the Sixties, through to modern gaming today, embark on a decade-by-decade voyage across videogaming's entire history. Explore defining titles, legendary developers, killer consoles and more!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EASTERN PROMISE
HOME-BREW

» Fun fact. When the SNES featured on the cover of **Retro Gamer** in issue 23 it was 15 years old. For comparison, the PS2 was nearly 21 years old.

SCORE
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TIME
01:57

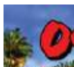
» [PSP] Retro compilations and the resurrection of classic IPs can make systems like the PSP feel older than they are.

Amoebatron
AIR
High Score 0000

» [ZX Spectrum] Should a game as old as *Manic Miner* now be classified as 'vintage'? Some think so.

PROTECT SOAPY AND T

» [PS2] One argument we often see is that only 2D games can be considered retro. Which is fine until you realise how quaint games like *Gun* now look.



commodore 64

» Eleven years may separate them, but both Tim and Nick grew up with the C64. Not Darran though, he was cool and had an Amstrad.

WHAT IS RETRO?

The team addresses that age-old question

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

Issue 216 featured the PlayStation 2 on the cover and generated a lot of interesting discussion, so the team felt it was the perfect opportunity to visit the most touchiest of subjects: What is retro?

TIM
Depends when you were born doesn't it? Like you and I are from the Seventies, kind of before videogames were a thing. Whereas Nick is only wee and has had videogames around him his whole life, I imagine.

DARRAN
What do you say? Wee Nick?

NICK
Yeah, I can't remember a time without them. My dad had an Atari 2600 in the house when I was a toddler, so they've always been a part of my life.

DARRAN
The age thing is perhaps the easiest thing, but it also causes the most issues, because people often (not always) find it hard to see anything beyond their own childhoods as being retro.

TIM
Yeah for some it'd be retro, for others – ancient history.

DARRAN
Which means some want retro to mean a certain period of time, which inevitably excludes people, and I don't personally like exclusion.

NICK
There are games that I associate with my teenage years that you two would have reviewed for work, and it would certainly be no fun to be told that my memories don't count.

DARRAN
So as a young pup, what did you play in your youth, Nick?

NICK
Although I'm young, we were pretty poor so I got a lot of hand-me-downs. I ended up with my dad's 2600 and my uncle's Commodore 64, and I got my own Master System for my sixth birthday – but that was in 1992 so it wasn't exactly cutting-edge. I was a generation or so behind the curve for a long time.

TIM
That's interesting because I started out with *Astro Wars* and then soon after a Commodore 64, so you kind of went through the same stuff. Paying your dues I guess, lol.

DARRAN
I've seen requests online that there should be a mag called 'Vintage Gamer' which covers the earlier 8-bit and 16-bit games. To me though, that's once again suggesting a little club of private members, which doesn't feel in the spirit of celebrating something for everyone.

NICK
If we were to put a hard limit on what we covered, sticking only to 8-bit and 16-bit systems, we'd run out of stuff – especially since we've been covering them for 17 years already.

DARRAN
Tim, as a newcomer to the mag, how does the balance strike you?

TIM
I think it's great – there's a good mix. The other thing is that as you get older you perceive time differently. So like the Nineties still feel really close, but then the other week when you said that the Xbox 360 can now be deemed retro, I couldn't get my head around it. I only got one in 2007! And then you do the math and realise that yeah I am old. Fuck.

DARRAN
It's worth remembering that PS2 is older than *Street Fighter* was when that game first appeared in issue 1 of **Retro Gamer**. Mad eh?

NICK
I remember doing a similar

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» [Dreamcast] Nick asked his sisters what they consider retro. Emily (24) said *Crazy Taxi*, Lianna (17) plumped for *Driver: San Francisco*, and Kerri (16) opted for *Minecraft*.

» [Atari 2600] Games have come a long way since the Atari 2600 and its awesome cartridges.
PITFALL!
DEFENDER
SPACE SHUTTLE
A JOURNEY INTO SPACE
Adventure
Space Invaders
combat
bowling
STAR WARS
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

calculation regarding *Burnout* and *Out Run* when the former appeared on the cover.

DARRAN
We've never picked a specific time period on the mag. Instead we have a cut-off date which is generally 15 years. The reason behind that is that at least two generations will typically have passed (it used to be ten years, but we upped it due to the Xbox 360 and PS3).

NICK
Yeah, generations have grown longer and that has helped us out a lot. Really, if you look at gaming 15 years ago, it doesn't feel a lot like today's scene does. Digital-only releases were a brand-new concept on consoles, and the *Oblivion* controversy over the horse armour DLC seems quaint by modern standards.

DARRAN
It's become more and more obvious that the way we use retro has a fluidity to it so the best thing to keep in mind is even if a particular system or article doesn't feel retro to you, it certainly will to someone else.

TIM
Pixels that take one button to control?

NICK
I remember when *Canabalt* came out and everyone hailed it as revolutionary for its single button control scheme. I think of that as emblematic of the modern indie movement, but I've looked it up and realised that it's over a decade old.

DARRAN
Ultimately this is a conundrum that will never have a definitive answer for many. We just felt this was the perfect opportunity to highlight where the mag stands from our own viewpoint. Enjoy your retro gaming, whatever it may be. *

» [Xbox 360] It may be a newer game, but *Earth Defence Force*'s controls (particularly for vehicles) are a long way away from those found in modern shooters.

» [Wii] Generally, if we do break our 15-year rule it's because the feature links to a classic series, or feels suitably retro, like this month's mobile phone article.

READERS REACT

What's your age and the last system you consider retro?

LateToGaming
I am 41 and consider the PS2 era to be retro, although I'm not entirely comfortable with that fact.

Andy Shearer
50 and for me, original Xbox, Dreamcast and GameCube.

Antiriad2097
At 50, the 16-bit systems are my retro. These new fangled 3D machines aren't.

Totschlagen
37. Anything without a built-in HDMI port feels retro to me.

Dale
47. Last system I consider retro is PS1.

Peter Badrick
I'm 47 and the last system I consider retro is the PS2.

fredghostmaster
I'm 50 and everything after the Mega Drive and SNES ain't retro to me.

Adam
I'm 34 and just about willing to accept that a PS2 is retro.

Steven Hall
Hi, I'm 46. I consider anything from the first to fifth console generation as retro.

Ewen Kirk
43, and I consider about 15 years ago to be the cut-off point for 'new' games, so the Xbox 360 and PS3 are now retro!

Andy Widger
For me at 47 years old it's gotta be the Master System and SNES. Good old cartridge style.

Lizzy
I'm 25 and I consider everything before the Gamecube era retro.

Justin Swan
51, I'd say PlayStation 2, original Xbox would be the latest I consider retro.

Benjamin Bischoff
I am 42. For me the last retro systems are the Genesis and the SNES.

Jason
I'm 36 and feel PS1 is retro. It's been 24 years since I got one, which is a very long time ago now. 2/3rds of my life!

Hayden Yale
I'm 42 and think retro is anything two generations ago or earlier.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

HIRONOBU SAKAGUCHI
DESIGNER
CHRONO TRIGGER
SQUARESOFT

SONIC 1 LETTERMAN JACKET

"It was my first one and is in immaculate condition."

PAID: £500

JE T'AIME
KEEP ON WORMING!
WORMS
TEAM17

SIGNED ANDY DAVIDSON WORMS POSTER

"I feel it could be my rarest item. The Mrs won't let me hang it up anywhere though!"

PAID: £300

A FLOCK TO BE PROUD OF

David's Sega jacket collection and signed games may make you jealous

BIO

NAME:
David Sheppard

LOCATION:
Lincoln, UK

FAVOURITE GAME:
Final Fantasy VII

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
GameCube

COLLECTION WORTH:
£5,000 - £6,000

TWITTER:
@sonicsheppard85

This month's collector is an unusual one, because while David Sheppard has a solid collection of videogames "I keep some of my favourites on my bookcase", his main focus is an extremely impressive collection of signed items and some rather fabulous gaming jackets.

David currently works for Rockstar Lincoln and it's clear he has a great love for gaming. "I've always been fascinated by gaming history," he tells us, "and the collecting of memorabilia, especially older items from the games of my childhood and it all evolved from there." That love of games has not only led to him never getting rid of any titles from his childhood but has also morphed to collecting signatures for his favourite titles. "Some items I've been fortunate enough to have signed in person at various events," he admits, "whereas others I've purchased from other collectors."

Ask anyone about particular games in their collection and they'll no doubt have a few interesting tales to tell and David is no different, and he's got a cracker about his well-loved *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past*. "Weird story behind that one," he tells us. "I bought it from someone in Leeds who turned out to be Joe Binks, a game designer at Rockstar Leeds at the time, while I'm at Rockstar Lincoln. Small world! It certainly looks like he played it a few times before it was signed!" While David clearly cares about his signed collection a lot, he's been relatively careful about travelling long distances just to get something signed. He has made the odd exception though. "Aside from Wolverhampton to specifically meet John Romero, I've not travelled far with the intention of getting something signed, more right place, and right time," he continues. "*Chrono Trigger* pre-signed by Sakaguchi was picked up in Tokyo in 2014 which must be the furthest."

Signed items aren't the only thing David collects, as he also has a bit of a thing for Sega jackets, although the beginnings of that passion were much more serendipitous. "I found an eBay listing for the *Sonic The Hedgehog* GOTY jacket and fell in love," he says. "After a little research, I discovered there were more so I set about tracking them down." That quest has led to quite a collection and it turns out that Sega isn't the only company to issue such unique merchandise. "Many games companies have branded clothing and merchandise for employees," explains David. "I've certainly been lucky enough to receive my share at Rockstar Lincoln. I can't imagine many companies outside of the US have those Letterman-style jackets though – pity." There is of course a downside to collecting such items and that's storage and general maintenance. "They're stored in protective sleeves in a wardrobe," David explains. "I've had them dry-cleaned once before, but I'm probably too nervous to wear them much, in case they get damaged or stained."

While David is really proud of his collection, it's not quite complete and he's hoping readers may be able to help him source the last few items he's after. "There is still at least one more jacket from Sega Technical Institute that I'm missing," he concludes. "Regarding my signed collection, I'm always on the lookout for Yuzo Koshiro stuff. A signed copy of *Tomb Raider* by Toby Gard and *XCOM* signed by Julian Gollop are high on the wish list. So if any of them are reading this, please get in touch!" *

Nintendo
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
A LINK TO THE PAST
SUPER NINTENDO
PAL VERSION

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

"It's signed by Miyamoto – enough said!"

PAID: £250

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

SONIC & KNUCKLES DENIM JACKET

"It features the awesome logo from my favourite Sonic game, and it's just a cool-looking jacket."

PAID: £180

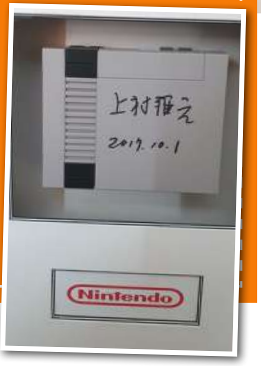
YUJI NAKA
PROGRAMMER
TAKASHI IIZUKA
DESIGNER
JUN SENOUE
COMPOSER
SONIC TEAM

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

NES MINI SIGNED BY MASAYUKI UEMURA

■ "It was bought from a collector in Germany."

PAID: £500



BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION

Rather than focus on one game we looked for a compilation that featured most of our cover games, which led us to the *Capcom Classics Collection* on Xbox and PS2 (the PSP equivalent has a different selection of games). The PS2 version sells between **£10** and **£25,** while the Xbox version can reach **£35.**

WIZKID

All three versions of *Wizkid* tend to top out at **£25-£30** for an original big box version. We've seen a *Hit Squad* Amiga variant sell for a cheaper price of **£15.**

ZOMBIES ATE MY NEIGHBORS

Complete Mega Drive PAL versions start at **£35+** while the NTSC variant sells for around **£40.** Complete NTSC SNES copies reach prices of **£80,** while the PAL version can go as high as **£110.** As always, loose carts are cheaper.

RIVER CITY GIRLS

UK Switch owners never received a physical release so you've two options. Buy a Japanese version from the likes of PlayAsia for **£50** or grab the standard Limited Run Games release on eBay for a similar price.

GRADIUS GAIDEN

There are different editions of this Japanese exclusive and both are rising in price with prices ranging between **£29** and **£67.** A weaker PSP version is available on the *Gradius Collection* in the UK and costs between **£20** and **£40.**

RISTAR

This quirky Mega Drive platformer is rising everywhere. PAL copies start complete from **£50** and can reach **£95** and the Genesis version ranges from **£75** to **£133** complete. Japanese copies sell complete for £314. Yikes!

MEGA MAN 2

Fancy living your own Classic Moments of this NES hit? Complete PAL copies range from **£50** to **£125** while the US version can hit prices of **£127.** The Japanese version is available as *Rock Man 2* and is a bit more reasonable at **£40.**

HOW MUCH?!

SUPER METROID

We'll never understand the 'graded' collecting market. A PAL copy of *Super Metroid* sold recently for an eye-watering **£7,500.** It makes our palms sweat just thinking about it.

Prices correct at time of print

POCKET ROCKET

Did SNK's Neo Geo Pocket Color have the best launch year ever?

There's a console that I adore, released here in the autumn of 1999 by a well-known arcade manufacturer. It was a capable piece of hardware released at a relatively low price, it had a great initial run of software, and then was cruelly cut down before it truly had a chance to shine. I could be talking about the Dreamcast here, but there's another machine that fits that description – SNK's Neo Geo Pocket Color.

Frankly, it's criminal that the Neo Geo Pocket Color didn't dethrone the Game Boy Color as the world's favourite handheld. Apart from being £10 cheaper, it was more powerful and had a brilliant clicky thumbstick that made controlling games a doddle. The battery life of 40 hours on a pair of AAs was frankly ludicrous, and you could even connect it to my other favourite lost cause, the Dreamcast. The games were all brilliant, too. If you had any love of classic arcade games, you'd have been occupied with expertly miniaturised versions of hits from SNK and other developers, while original titles developed for the system offered slower, more considered experiences that were no less enjoyable.

The Neo Geo Pocket Color is a joy to collect for, too. There are quite a few heavy hitters to track down such as *Cotton*, *Dive Alert* and *Pocket Reversi*, but plenty of great games can be had on the cheap if you're willing to settle for loose cartridges. If you do opt for complete games though, you'll get a lovely premium experience as European games were packaged in plastic cases with full-colour manuals, rather than the rubbish cardboard boxes Game Boy games used. Based on all of that, I think it's fair to say that it was the single greatest gaming system ever created.

Fine, I'll admit to being a little facetious there. As much as I adore SNK's machine, its short life and limited library mean that it can't really be in the conversation for the greatest system ever. That would be true even if all the games were brilliant, which they definitely weren't. But I was recently looking back over the reception that the system received from the UK's multiformat magazines, *GamesMaster*, *CVG* and *Arcade* (*Edge* wasn't reviewing handheld games). Based on what I read, I do think it's a dark horse candidate for having the greatest launch year of any console ever.

In the nine months before it recalled the console, SNK released a variety of games that were of a consistently high quality. Just look at the list of games to receive 5/5 or 90%+ in those magazines – *Fatal Fury: First Contact*, *The King Of Fighters R-2*, *Metal Slug 1st Mission* and its sequel *Metal Slug 2nd Mission*, *Neo Turf Masters*, *Pac-Man*, *Puzzle Bobble Mini*, *SNK Vs Capcom: Card Fighters Clash* and *Sonic Pocket Adventure*. That's a top-scoring game every month, and it's likely that there could have been more, as *SNK Vs Capcom: Match Of The Millennium* slipped past all three magazines.

What's more, there were no games that were unanimously considered to be duds. *CVG* reviewed 18 Neo Geo Pocket Color games, and not a single one scored less than 3/5. *GamesMaster*'s 20 reviews average out to 83.1%, which is quite impressive indeed – and it's worth noting that two of the games scoring less than 80%, *The King Of Fighters R-2* and *Neo Turf Masters*, both received top scores elsewhere. Likewise, all four games that *Arcade* scored 2/5 or lower scored 4/5 or 80%+ in the other magazines. The consensus 'worst' game was *Baseball Stars*, scoring 59% in *GamesMaster* and 3/5 in both *CVG* and *Arcade*, which is hardly a disaster.

Of course, it's worth adding the caveat that plenty of games weren't reviewed in these magazines, despite being released in our region. For whatever reason, the likes of *Cool Boarders Pocket*, *Evolution: Eternal Dungeons* and *Shanghai Mini* didn't receive any coverage. But if you pick up a random Neo Geo Pocket Color game from the European release line-up, broadly speaking the bare minimum you'll end up with is a competently developed game that will entertain you for the duration of a train journey. You certainly can't say that of every gaming platform.

I'm unlikely to buy any more Neo Geo Pocket Color games in the near future as I have amassed almost all of the ones I'm interested in. But I'll always have fond memories of buying random batches of games and discovering quirky new favourites like *Puzzle Link 2* and *SNK Gals' Fighters*, as well as the hundreds of hours I spent on *SNK Vs Capcom: Card Fighters Clash* and my rare chances to use the link cable for a race on *Sonic Pocket Adventure*. Though I've since let them go, I've even been fortunate enough to own and complete *Faselei!* and *The Last Blade: Beyond The Destiny*.

These days, I don't even have to worry so much about the games I've sold on. *The Last Blade* has now appeared on Switch as part of SNK's Neo Geo Pocket Color Selection, and I'm hoping that many more games will follow because a library of that quality shouldn't be confined to the original hardware, even if those Joycons will never replicate that magnificent thumbstick. If you're not ready to dive into the increasingly expensive world of Neo Geo Pocket Color collecting, I'd highly recommend you check these releases out if you get the chance – it's not often a relatively obscure platform gets this kind of love, and it's rare for any short-lived system to have so many great games. *

MY TOP 5

THE GAMES THAT NEVER LEAVE MY CARRY CASE

SNK VS CAPCOM: CARD FIGHTERS CLASH

After over 100 hours of play, my deck is ridiculously strong and perfect for beating Daz.

SONIC POCKET ADVENTURE

I scoured every corner of every stage to find those puzzle pieces.

NEO TURF MASTERS

The perfect sports game to drop in and out of while on the go.

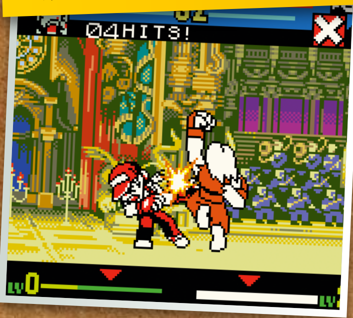
METAL SLUG: 2ND MISSION

With life bars and non-linear progression, it's a different prospect to the arcade games.

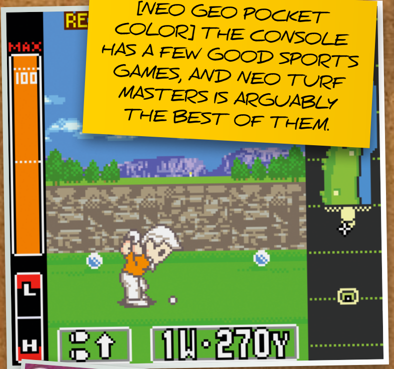
SNK VS CAPCOM: MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM

Tag team fighting on a Nineties handheld is practically witchcraft.

[NEO GEO POCKET COLOR] AS YOU'D EXPECT FROM AN SNK CONSOLE, THE NGPC EXCELS WHEN IT COMES TO FIGHTING GAMES.



[NEO GEO POCKET COLOR] THE CONSOLE HAS A FEW GOOD SPORTS GAMES, AND NEO TURF MASTERS IS ARGUABLY THE BEST OF THEM.



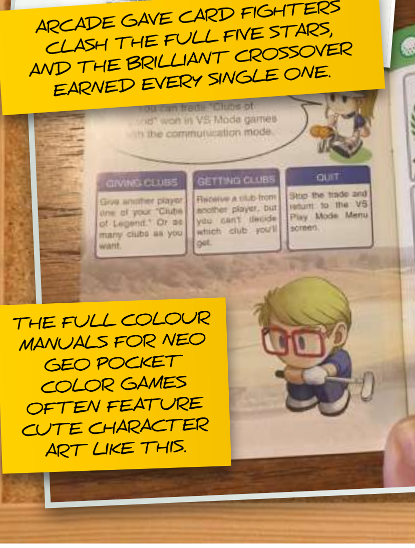
Other Systems

Neo Geo

CARD FIGHTERS' CLASH

SNK AND CAPCOM DEAL A WINNING HAND

ARCADE GAVE CARD FIGHTERS CLASH THE FULL FIVE STARS, AND THE BRILLIANT CROSSOVER EARNED EVERY SINGLE ONE.



You can trade "Clubs of

nd" won in VS Mode games

th the communication mode.

GIVING CLUBS

Give another player one of your "Clubs of Legend." Or as many clubs as you want.

GETTING CLUBS

Receive a club from another player, but you can't decide which club you'll get.

QUIT

Stop the trade and return to the VS Play Mode Menu screen.

THE FULL COLOUR MANUALS FOR NEO GEO POCKET COLOR GAMES OFTEN FEATURE CUTE CHARACTER ART LIKE THIS.

POWER
OPTION
B
A
NEOGEO POCKET COLOR
Color
SNK

SNK
FASELEI!

MY LOVELY BLUE NEO GEO POCKET COLOR, FROM BACK WHEN I STILL OWNED A COPY OF FASELEI!

[SWITCH] THE NEO GEO POCKET COLOR CATALOGUE IS FINALLY BEING REVIVED ON SWITCH, AND NOT BEFORE TIME.

[NEO GEO POCKET COLOR] PUZZLE LINK 2 HOLDS UP WELL AGAINST GENRE HEAVYWEIGHTS LIKE PUYO PUYO, MAGICAL DROP AND PUZZLE BOBBLE.

REVIEWS

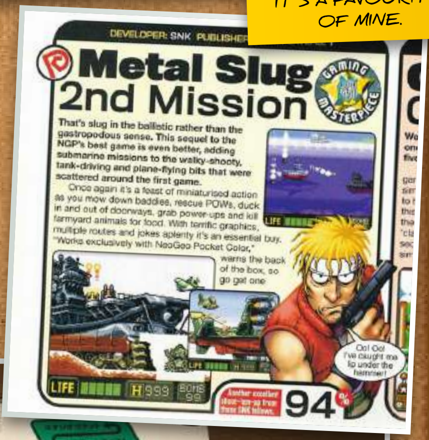
SONIC POCKET ADVENTURE

Spiky speedster gets shrunk in the wash

COST £24.99
OUT NOW

WIN A COPY OF SONIC

INITIALLY, I WASN'T COLLECTING THESE REVIEW SCORES FOR A WORK PURPOSE – I WAS JUST DOING IT FOR MY OWN AMUSEMENT.



DEVELOPER: SNK PUBLISHER

Metal Slug 2nd Mission

That's slug in the ballistic rather than the gastropodous sense. This sequel to the NGP's best game is even better, adding submarine missions to the walky-shooty, tank-driving and plane-flying bits that were scattered around the first game.

Once again it's a feast of miniaturised action as you mow down baddies, rescue POWs, duck in and out of doorways, grab power-ups and kill farmyard animals for food. With terrific graphics, multiple routes and jokes aplenty it's an essential buy. "Works exclusively with NeoGeo Pocket Color," warns the back of the box, so go get one

METAL SLUG: 2ND MISSION EARNED A WHOPPING 94% FROM GAMESMASTER, AND IT'S A FAVOURITE OF MINE.

GOLFER PROFILES

George Spinner
(Country: USA, Age: 26.)
A fresh hero with balanced play and average ability. (Good choice for beginners.)
Power :★★★
Control :★★★
Technique :★★★
Recovery :★★★
Putting :★★★
Hook/Slice : Level 4

Fernando Almeida
(Country: Brazil, Age: 34.)
A super drive to destroy opponents averages at 300 yards. But···?? (Good for expert players.)
Power :★★★★★
Control :★
Technique :★
Recovery :★
Putting :★
Hook/Slice : Level 3

Robert Landort
(Country: Germany, Age: 43.)
Excellent control earns him the name Europe's Golf Machine. Has trouble in the rough and the bunker. (Good for beginners.)
Power :★★★★
Control :★★★★★
Technique :★★
Recovery :★★
Putting :★★★★
Hook/Slice : Level 2

25

NEOGEO POCKET LINK CABLE
SNK
CRUSH ROLLER
FIGHTERS
METAL SLUG 1ST MISSION
NEO CHERRY MASTER Color
PUZZLE BOBBLE MINI
TAITO

THIS IS THE STATE OF MY COLLECTION TODAY – PLENTY OF CHEAPER UNBOXED GAMES, AND EVEN THE DREAMCAST LINK CABLE.

WHICH SYSTEM HAD THE GREATEST DEBUT YEAR?

Readers tell us which hardware they were glad to buy early

StevieROM
We waited a bit longer in the UK for the N64 but it was well worth the wait with *Mario 64*, *Mario Kart 64*, *Diddy Kong Racing*, *GoldenEye*, *Blast Corps*, *Turok*, *Killer Instinct Gold* and *Lylat Wars* all releasing in 1997. What a year.

James Suddes
The Dreamcast had something for everyone, *Soul Calibur*, the return of Sonic, not to mention online *Chu Chu Rocket* out the box.

Martin Gams
PlayStation… *Ridge Racer*, *WipEout*, *Tekken*, *Resident Evil*… the beginning of a new way of gaming.

Robert August de Meijer
The SNES immediately caught up with the Mega Drive: *Street Fighter II*, *Zelda 3* [*A Link To The Past*], *Final Fantasy IV*, *Mario Kart*, *ActRaiser*, *Super Castlevania IV*, *Contra III*, *Super Mario World*, *Turtles In Time*…

Oliver Roderick
Surely there's no other answer than the Switch, which had the finest game of all time in *Zelda: Breath Of The Wild* on day one and *Mario Odyssey* later that year. Not to mention it actually got strong third parties for the first time in an eternity on a Nintendo system that year.

Pete Adamson
PS2 easily, *Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath Of Cortex*, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* and lots of others. Also GameCube. OK, the *really* good games took a while but come oooon.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books

STAR LETTER

OLD GAMES RULE

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Let us take a moment to think of all the incredible games that were released in 1991, which is now 30 years ago. *Lemmings*, *Street Fighter II*, *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Civilization* and *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past* were all released in 1991 and remain brilliant to this day. There's plenty of other titles I could list, but I'm sure you get the picture…

Fast forward to today, and as much as I enjoy the likes of *Spider-Man: Miles Morales*, *The Last Of Us Part II* and *Call Of Duty: Black Ops – Cold War*, I can't really see them being widely celebrated by gamers in 2051. As videogames continue to strive towards realistic looking visuals it feels like they are doing it at the expense of making them fun (have you played *The Last Of Us*? It's grim as hell). Sure there was a simplicity to the old games, but I feel that that simplicity was their strength and it's why I'm sure I'll be still playing them in another 30 years (providing I can still hold a joystick of course). Anyway, I was interested to see what you think. Will the big hitters of today still be relevant in another three decades? I think not.

Paul Burton

That's an interesting topic, Paul. It's hard to tell how games like *Spider-Man: Miles Morales* and *The Last Of Us Part II* will age, so we wouldn't like to bet on that just yet. Darran has long maintained that as videogames continue to get increasingly realistic it simply highlights how underdeveloped their stories and characters tend to be, so we do agree that hyper realism isn't always everything. We've been mulling over this question all day, so we'll be sending you a book for engaging our noodles.

» PS4] It's critically acclaimed now, but will that be true of *The Last Of Us Part II* in 30 years' time?

>Boxing Clever

» Rex would love to see us revisit features like this one from issue 5.

BACK TO BASICS

Dear **Retro Gamer** team,
As a longtime subscriber (digital) on the other side of the world, I watch on with this virus causing havoc around the world. No doubt you will be in lockdown again. No doubt you will be working from home. No doubt you will produce the best magazine each month regardless. However this may cause the magazine to be 'slimmed down'. So I thought…

Every now and then I read in the Mailbag pages about other readers asking for subjects to be covered. Mine are a resurrection of articles/topics you covered in your early years.

In the early issues of **Retro Gamer** you had an Advertising Gallery feature. **Retro Gamer** issue 1 had 1983 and looked at classic adverts on computers. Issue 2 had the 1984 Advertising Gallery looking at arcade software. You even included full articles/pieces like in issue 5 on the world of Eighties TV spin-off games. Some of these adverts are masterpieces in their own right. OK, not all but some.

Is it possible to bring this back? Could something like this help pad out the magazine if you are coming up short? I suppose there will be copyright issues and other legal issues to deal with. Maybe it's not a good idea after all.

Rex

There's no such thing as a bad idea, Rex. We like this one, but we don't feel the old style would work in the magazine anymore. We've heard nothing to suggest more page cuts are coming, so please try not to worry. And thanks for your continual subscription. Subscribers are incredibly important to us at all times, so we really appreciate your support.

PLUG TIME

Hello there,
My name is Pietro Galvagno and I'm a solo indie-game developer who is currently working on a truly cool Eighties-themed arcade game and I was wondering if you would be interested in covering my project?
I know that **Retro Gamer** is an institution in the world of retro gaming and it would be a dream come true if my game could be featured by you!
The game is called *AntiVirus Force* and I've included some early pixel art of it.
Thanks,

Pietro Galvagno

No problem, Pietro. Let us know how *AntiVirus Force* shapes up.

NEO GEO FOREVER

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I'm new to your reading ranks having only just become aware of the magazine. Your mag was brought to my attention through a Neo Geo thread on a forum following your latest feature in issue 215. I'm glad, as it's a great read, and it's fantastic to pick up a physical magazine dedicated to retro gaming.

I thought I would get in touch to share a very recent build I have only just completed (Nov 2020). Being a longtime fan of Neo Geo, but never being able to afford the hardware, I set about building my own replica MVS-1-25 arcade cabinet from scratch. Given your recent feature it felt quite apt to drop you a line.

The unit uses real hardware (a MV-1FZ board) with a Terraonion

» Chris Merchant's custom Neo Geo cabinet features *Twinkle Star Sprites*. He's clearly a man of taste.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

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Somerset, BA1 1UA

Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

Neo SD Pro cart (until I can collect some original MVS carts – wallet allowing) and a CRT monitor for the authentic screen look. The controls are all Sanwa and there's a Suzo Happ coin door for good measure. In the base there is a ten-inch subwoofer for some added oomph. It was a labour of love. Here is a link to a short video of the finished article: youtu.be/0g4O9p9zmzl.

Being proponents of the retro gaming scene I would be very interested to hear your thoughts on my build.

Kind regards,

Chris Merchant

We're glad you enjoyed the article, Chris. Your cabinet looks excellent and we hope you get a lot of enjoyment out of it. MVS is certainly a cheaper option if you want to move into Neo Geo collecting, so keep an eye out for *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* and *Neo Drift Out: New Technology*. Darran swears by both of them.

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Buy 3, SAVE 20%
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£4.99
Look inside

» You can buy back issues from magazinesdirect.com. Be quick, as issues can sell out quickly.

MAG SEEKER

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I would like to know whether there is a convenient way to order **Retro Gamer** back issues in print, as there are some issues that may be useful to a research project I am currently working on. While I am aware that digital issues can be ordered through Apple Newsstand and similar services, I find that print issues might be more useful.

Thank you,

Matthew Harris

We hope your project goes well, Matthew. We sell back issues through magazinesdirect.com, but their popularity means they can sell out fast. Your best bet for older issues is auction sites like eBay.

KEEP COLLECTING

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I'm loving your So You Want To Collect… section and I really hope that you can continue them on a monthly basis as they make for fascinating reading. I was amazed to discover how much some of my Nintendo 64 games are currently worth, but it also gives me great ideas for what to collect next. I'd love to see articles on the Game Boy, Gamecube, Game Boy Advance and DS (I love Nintendo).

Keep up the great work.

Jason Read

We're glad you're enjoying the articles, Jason. We're actually planning to keep this as regular as possible, so we're bound to cover your requests soon.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Nostalgia down under

Early on in January we received a package from a reader called Nick who clearly grew up on the likes of *Amiga Power* and *Your Sinclair*. He not only sent us photos of his collection, but personal letters and a bunch of bootleg T-shirts, that must have cost a fortune to send from Australia. Thanks Nick, your letters really cheered us up and made a miserable January that little bit lighter.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Capcom arcade game?

Kaidan Xain
Armored Warriors really caught me by surprise when I played it on the *Capcom Beat-'Em-Up Collection*. Being able to swipe enemy parts really adds some variety to a genre known for typically being one note.

Phil Rowland
I always have and always will go back to *Strider*. Can play through it pretty much blindfolded but 'big run' never fails to blow me away.

Sylvain Pellodi
The *Ghosts 'N Goblins* series for sure, *Final Fight* and *Strider* are just behind…

Violent
Street Fighter II: Champion Edition is one of the best, if not the best fighting game and for its time was very advanced. Shoryuken!

Peter Snoeren
Final Fight, easily the best arcade beat-'em-up ever made. I can't think of any other arcade beat-'em-up that is as technically refined and satisfying to play.

Tacit Kaiju
Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow Over Mystara! Branching paths, multiple endings and the sheer fun of playing the caster classes with their multiple spells! I spent so much time trying to path out everything, it was fantastic.

Kelvin Courtenay
Without a doubt it has to be *1942*. It was quite a basic game, but so addictive.

Bruno Tiburcio
Super Street Fighter II is an even more refined version of an already perfect game. Plus, it introduced Cammy, who is still my main!

RetroSteveUK
Bionic Commando, but it's the Speccy version that's my first choice. I played it to death back then, and the soundtrack was to die for! I've played the arcade version, but I'd always go to the Spectrum version first.

SaftyKuma
Street Fighter III: Third Strike. At the end of the day I still think it is one of the greatest fighting games created, and though I sucked at it, I enjoyed playing the arcade version when it came out against other players.

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury,
Bath, Somerset, BA1 1UA

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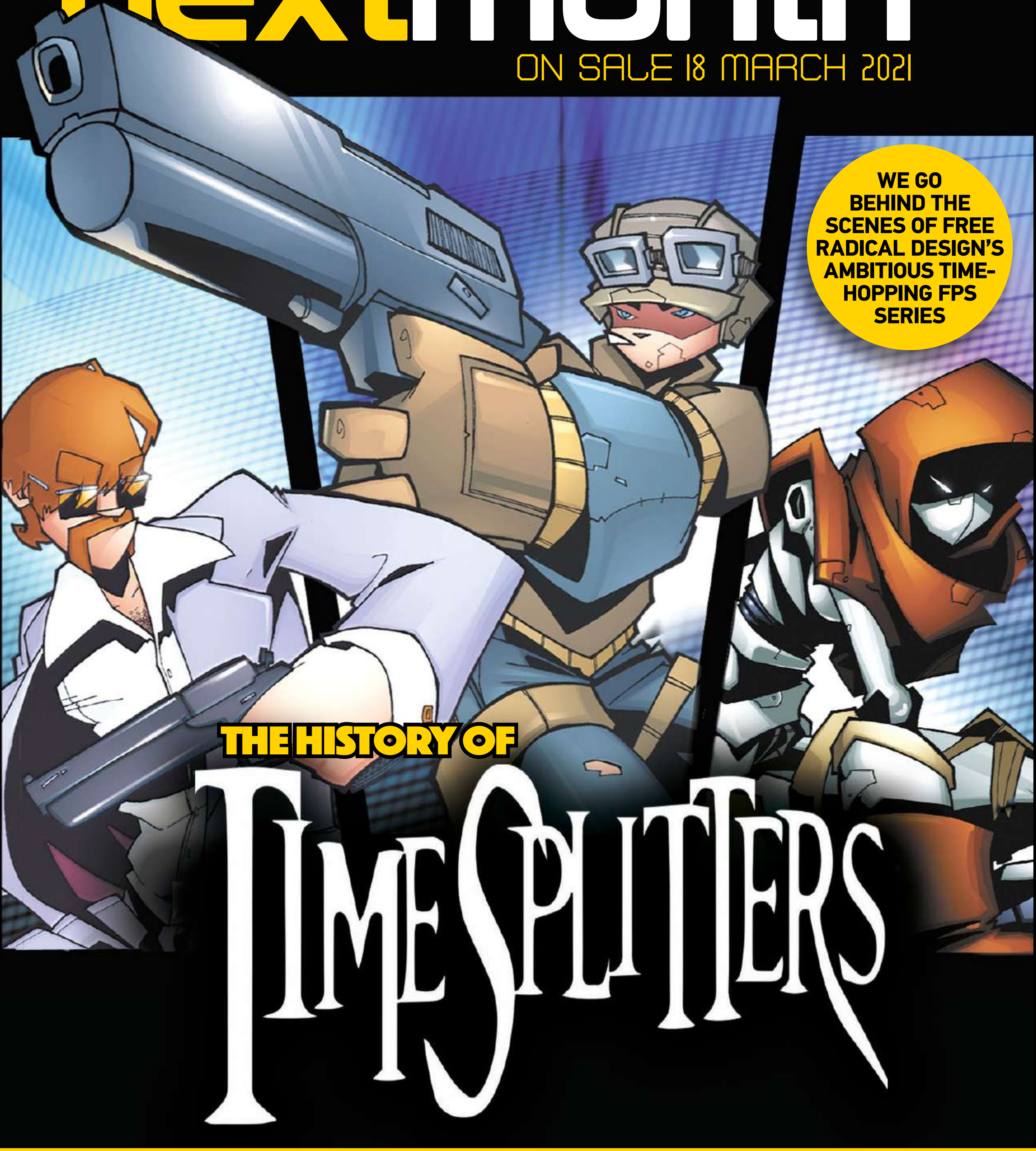
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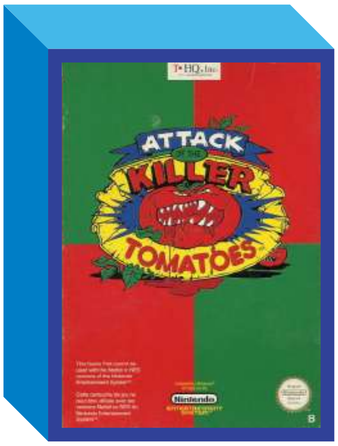
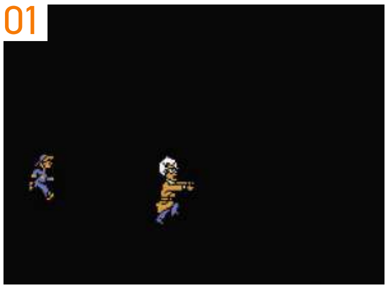


ATTACK OF THE KILLER TOMATOES

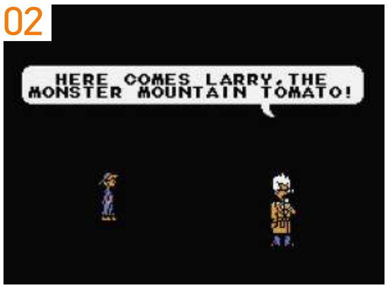
» As we all know, dietary experts recommend five portions of fruit and vegetables per day to maintain a healthy lifestyle. We can only wonder how many children struggled with that target after being put off tomatoes by this anti-tomato propaganda, which is frankly outrageous in its allegations. Do tomatoes have big teeth and kill people? Of course not – Brussels sprouts would sue for gimmick infringement. Oh, yes, the ending. Sorry.

01



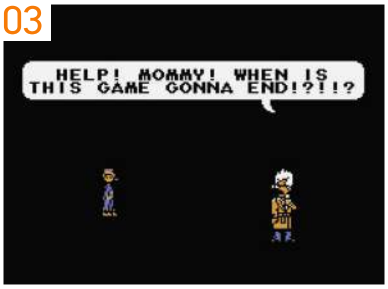
» Hang on, we've reached the end of the game. Why are these guys still running? This is the point at which everybody is supposed to leap into the air, posing awkwardly as the frame freezes. Eighties movies tell us so.

02



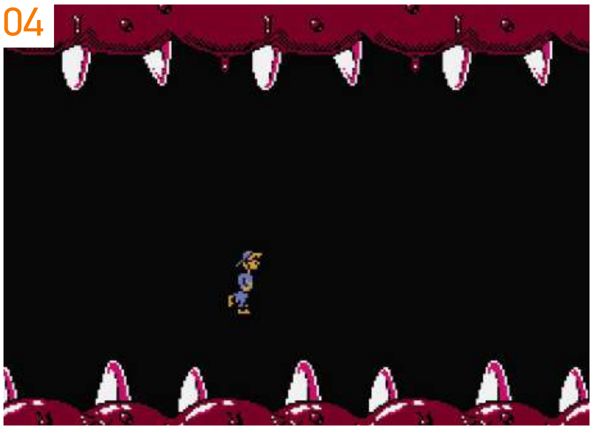
» Oh, there's another tomato. Not just any killer tomato, mind, but Larry, the monster mountain tomato. Is the 'monster' bit a reference to his size, or does he actually come from a place called Monster Mountain? We think the former.

03



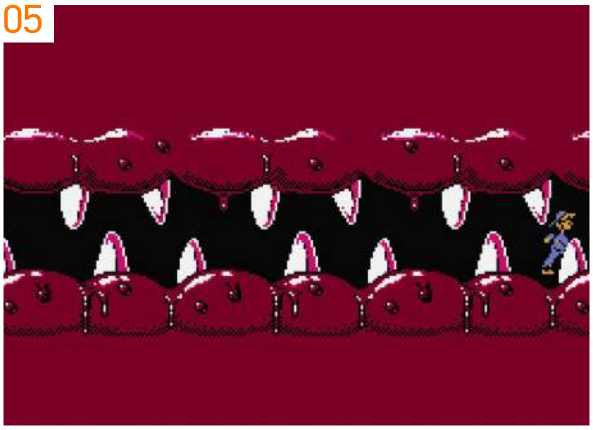
» There's no time to debate the etymology of crazy murderous salad ingredients, though – our guy here just wants to know when the game is going to end. He's a bit behind, we questioned that two screenshots ago. Keep up, mate.

04



» Well, the very courageous man has run away and left a mere child behind – and since this is one of those bad endings, the jaws of a tomato start to close in from the edges of the screen. The kid scrambles to escape the murderous fruit, but we suspect it's just too late.

05



» There we go, jaws closed, kid presumably dead. Larry can happily retire to Monster Mountain [I thought we decided that it wasn't a place? - Ed] and let his meal digest. Actually, have nutritionists told us how many portions of human are healthy for carnivorous tomatoes? Enquiring minds demand answers.

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